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# ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

A MERCURY PUBLICATION

*Win a new English Ford*

*It's easy, it's fun.*

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MARGERY ALLINGHAM JAMES M. CAIN
CORNELL WOOLRICH

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2 You can send one entry for each member of your family, but only one entry per person. (Members of our staff and their families are not eligible.)

3 The winning entry will be the one which comes closest to listing the stories in this issue in the order of their popularity, and the order of popularity will be determined by crediting 6 points for each first place listing, 5 points for each second place listing, and so on down to one point for each sixth place listing. In case of a tie, the entry with the earliest postmark will win. The judges will be the editors of EQMM, and their decision will be final. No entries can be returned.

4 Fill in your name and address and mail your entry to Ford Contest, EQMM, 471 Park Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. All entries must be postmarked not later than February 25, 1955. The winner will be notified by March 25, and the winner's name will be announced in the June issue of EQMM, on sale early in May.

Ford Contest
ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE
471 Park Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

*Here is my selection of the six most popular stories in this February 1955 issue of ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE:*

*(Use the numbers as they appear on table of contents.)*

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# ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

*including* BLACK MASK MAGAZINE


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*The best of the new and the best of the old*


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*An innocent young girl from the country comes to the big city to live with her older sister — and runs into trouble the very first day. But before the nightmare started, the country girl made a friend — a beautiful wax dummy in the show window of an exclusive store on the Avenue. The golden-wigged dummy with the friendly smile became the girl's patron saint — and she sure needed one! . . . This tale of a* **Beneficent Mannequin in the Black Mask** *manner is one of Cornell Woolrich's most gripping human-interest thrillers and another fascinating study in the terror that lurks all around us in our seemingly commonplace everyday lives . . .*

# 1. MEET ME BY THE MANNEQUIN

*by CORNELL WOOLRICH*

ALL THE WAY UP ON THE BUS I KEPT wondering if she'd be glad to see me or not. I hadn't told her I was coming. For that matter, I hadn't told them at the other end I was leaving — not until after I'd gone. Just a note left behind in my room: *Dear Mom and Pop: I can't stand it here any more. I'm not going back to high school when it opens, I'm going to the city. I want to begin to really live. Please don't worry about me, I'll be all right. I'll look up Jean and stay with her. Love — Francine.* And that's what I was on my way to do right now.

My sister Jean hadn't been much older than I was when she left, just under eighteen. She hadn't told us much in her letters, but the little she'd said had made it sound wonderful to me. She told us she had a job, but she'd never said what it was. She must have been making a lot of money at it. I don't think there'd been a letter in the three years she was gone that hadn't had at least a twenty and sometimes as high as a fifty-dollar bill in it. But when I'd suggested running up to see her during my school vacation the summer before, she hadn't seemed to want me to come. It was so hot, she'd said, and I wouldn't like it. And when I insisted, she finally said she wasn't going to be there herself, she was going away. But then six months afterwards, in one of her later letters, she forgot she'd said that and mentioned something about being stuck in the city through the whole summer.

I wondered vaguely why she hadn't wanted her kid sister to visit her. I supposed she'd thought I wasn't old enough yet, or they needed me at home, or she felt I ought to finish high school first, and let it go at that.

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Older sisters aren't always so easy to figure out.

I had her address, the one we wrote her to, but it was just Greek to me. I wasn't worried about finding it though. I'd ask my way when I got there, and that'd be all there was to it.

The bus got in quite late and I was tired. I was hungry, too, and I only had twenty-two cents left, after paying my bus fare and buying a sandwich and coffee at noon. But of course I was going straight to Jean, so what difference did that make?

I climbed down and looked around the terminal. Wonderland was already beginning. I had a single bag with me, not much bigger than a telephone directory. I hadn't brought much, mostly because I didn't have much to bring. Who wanted country stuff when you were going to start life in the city, anyway?

I chose one of the many exits at random, and came out on an avenue that was sheer magic. It stretched as far as the eye could reach, and the buildings were tall along it, and neon signs all colors of the rainbow flashed against the night sky. I'd reached the Promised Land, all right.

I was so enthralled that I decided to put off asking my way to Jean's for a little while and do a little roaming around first. There was plenty of time, it was still early.

I'd walked along for about five or ten blocks, bag in hand, when I first saw the mannequin. It was in a lighted show window on the Avenue — Chalif-Bleekman's — where there were a row of them with sort of tea-colored faces and gold and silver wigs. It was the one on the end. The others all looked ritzy, but the one on the end had a sort of friendly smile on her face. Her expression seemed to say: "Hi, little girl. Welcome to the city. If you ever need a friend, or get in a jam, come around and tell me all about it."

I don't know how to explain what I mean. It sounds sort of crazy, I know. You have to be pretty young, and you have to be pretty imaginative — like everyone said I was back home — to get it. If you're hardboiled or cynical, you won't get it at all. It's like some people carry around a rabbit's foot, and others have a lucky coin with a hole in it. It's like some people believe in a lucky star, and others in a patron saint. This mannequin became my patron saint at sight. Oh, I knew it was just a wax figure that couldn't talk or hear or think. I wasn't that dumb. But that didn't alter the case any. Everyone has to have a little fantasy in their life. And I was lonely and didn't know anybody and it was my first night in the city. That was why, I guess.

Anyway, I stood there day-dreaming in front of it, and telling it all my hopes and fears and ambitions. Not out loud, of course. And it looked back with that understanding smile, as if it was trying to say: "Sure. I know. Don't worry, everything'll turn out all right. And if it doesn't, you know where to find me, I'll al-

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ways be here, night and day." It was like a pact made between us, that first night, that was never to be broken afterwards.

Finally I had to move on. It was getting late, and I had to get up to Jean's. I put the pads of my fingers against the glass in a sort of parting gesture, and went on my way. The others all looked ritzy with their noses in the air, but *mine* had that same friendly, sympathetic smile to the end.

I saw a policeman rolling traffic stanchions out of the middle of the street, and I went over to him to ask my way. It's always safest to ask a policeman when you're in a strange city. I knew that much.

He scratched the back of his head when I handed him the scrap of paper that had Jean's address penciled on it. Then he looked me over, up and down, standing there in my country clothes with my little bag in my hand.

Instead of telling me where it was, he said: "Are you sure you want to go there?"

"Certainly," I said in surprise. "I'm — I'm supposed to."

He mumbled something under his breath that sounded like: "Ah, it's a shame — but what can a cop on traffic duty do about it?"

"Thank you," I said when he'd finished telling me which direction to take.

He shook his head as if he felt sorry for me. "Don't thank me," he sighed. "Sure and it's no favor I'm doing you."

I looked back and saw him still watching me and shaking his head. He seemed to have recognized the address, but I couldn't understand why he should feel so bad about my going there.

Even the twenties and fifties she'd sent home hadn't prepared me for the looks of it when I finally reached it. Why, she must be making money hand-over-fist to be able to afford living in such a place! I almost thought for a minute I'd made a mistake. I went over to the doorman to verify the number. Yes, it was the right one. I asked him which floor Jean Everton lived on.

He acted as though he'd never heard the name before. He went inside to consult a second uniformed man in the hall. Instead of waiting where I was, I went in after him. I was certain she lived here. She wouldn't have given this address in her letters if she hadn't. I was just in time to hear the second hallman saying under his breath: "Edwards, that's who it is. She sometimes gets mail here under the other name. I remember she left orders with me about that once." Then he looked at me and dropped his voice even lower, but I could still make out what he was saying. "Must be a new girl they're taking on. Better not let her go up the front way; they won't like it, they're open already."

The first one stepped back to me and whispered in a peculiar confidential undertone, as though it were a

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secret. "It's the penthouse you want. But you're not supposed to go in through the front like this; you'd get in Dutch if they ever caught you trying it, and so would we if we let you. You girls are supposed to use the back way. I'll show you where it is."

He took me outside and around to the side of the building, and through a delivery passage to a service elevator run by a grinning colored man. "Take her up to The Place," he said to him mysteriously.

"Up there?" the operator asked with a strange look.

"Up there." The doorman nodded secretively.

On the way up he turned to me and asked: "You ever been up there befo', miss?"

I said: "No, I never have."

He didn't answer, just said, "Um-um," and I caught him shaking his head a little, the same way the cop had.

He stopped the car finally and opened the door onto a little vestibule. There was only one other door, a strong-looking thing with a little peephole in the middle of it. I went unhesitatingly over to it and pushed a bell.

The kind-faced operator behind me seemed to close his car door almost reluctantly, as though he hated to leave me up there. The last I saw of him he was still shaking his head dolefully.

None of this really registered on me at the time. I was too excited at the prospect of seeing Jean. Besides, the city was such a whole new world to me that the way people acted was bound to seem strange at first, until I got used to it. That was all it was, I told myself.

The peephole opened and an eye peered out at me. A single eye, blue, and hard as agate. A little whiff of sachet seeped out through the hole.

A woman's voice said harshly: "Yes?"

I said: "Is Jean in there?"

The eye slid around in a half-turn, away from the opening. "Somebody to see Jean."

Chains clicked against steel and the door swung grudgingly open. I edged in timidly, bag in hand.

There were three women in there, but Jean wasn't one of them. It looked like some kind of a dressing-room. There was a mirror-strip along the wall, and a long table and chairs under it. They all looked at me. They were beautifully dressed, lovely to look at. But there was something hard and forbidding about them, I don't know quite what. There was a confused hum coming from somewhere nearby — like the drone of a lot of voices. Every once in a while it rose sharply to a crescendo, as though something exciting had just happened, then it would die down again to a breathless, waiting hush. Then start over.

"Where is she?" I asked uncertainly.

The answer was an ungracious snarl. "She's out in front, where d'ya suppose? You didn't expect to find her back here, did ya? We're open already." She snapped cigarette ashes

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at me with her thumbnail. "If you were sent here to work, you better get into your duds fast. You're an hour late."

I just stared stupidly.

She jackknifed her finger at my bag. "Brought your own clothes, didn't you? Well, whaddaya waiting for?" She gave me a shove that nearly overturned the nearest chair, and me with it.

"Gord!" she said to the others. "She's gonna be a credit to the place! Jean musta had a lapse of memory when she picked her out."

"Them dumb ones make the best come-ons," one of the others snapped back. "Didn't you ever know that? And since when does Jean do the picking anyway? She takes whoever Rosetti wishes on her, and likes it!"

There was a sudden peremptory slamming on the inside door, the one across the way from where I had come in, and they froze to silence. A man's voice called through: "Come on, you tramps in there, get going! Three of the tables need pepping up."

They jumped like trained seals through paper hoops, jostling each other in their eagerness to be the first out. The blur of noise rose sharply with the opening of the door. A phrase came through it. "Twenny-one — red!" And then someone said, "Whee!" A minute later the door had closed again and I was alone.

A human being can be in a situation in which she never was before, and her instincts will tell her what her experience cannot. That happened to me now. They'd just called me dumb, and I was dumb. I didn't know the first thing about this place. I'd never been in one like it before. And yet I knew instinctively I didn't like it here. I wanted to get out without even waiting to see Jean. Something told me to. Something told me not to stay a minute longer.

It wasn't those three girls so much. Their bark was worse than their bite. It was something about the sound of that voice that had come through the door just now. There had been something evil in it. It was the sort of voice you hear in secret places, where secret things are done that never see the light of day. I remembered now the way the cop and the elevator operator had both shaken their heads. They'd known. They'd known something about this place.

There was no one in there with me at the moment, no one to stop me. All I had to do was take the chains off that door, slip out the way I'd come in, ring for the rear elevator. Then I remembered I only had twenty-two cents. But even that wasn't enough to keep me here. I could telephone Jean from outside and ask her to come out and meet me.

I had my hand out to the first chain, trying to get it out of its socket without making any noise, when I heard my name called in a frightened whisper behind me.

"Francie!"

Jean was standing in the opposite doorway. She came in quickly and

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locked the door behind her. There was something sick and choked in her voice. "They told me there was somebody back here asking for me — but you're the last person I expected to see!"

She had diamonds on her wrists and at her throat, and flowers in her hair, and champagne on her breath. She was old. Golden-haired and beautiful, and yet somehow old and tired-looking. Not like when she'd left home.

Her voice was a hiss of terror, like air whistling out of a punctured tire. "What got into you to do this? Why did you come here of all places? This is the last place on earth you should have come!"

"Why? I only wanted to see you."

She evidently didn't have time to explain. "Quick! Has anyone seen you?"

"Only those three girls —"

"I can shut them up. They work under me. Come on, get out of here fast!"

"But Jean. I came here to stay with you, to live with you."

"You don't know what you're saying! Stop arguing, someone may come in here any minute. I want you to take the next bus and go back home. I'd take you down and put you on it myself, only I can't leave here right now —"

"But Jean, I have only twenty-two cents."

She bent over, fumbled frantically with the side of her stocking, thrust a crumpled bill into my hand. It wasn't a twenty, it wasn't even a fifty this time. It was a hundred-dollar bill. I'd never seen one before. I didn't want the money, I wanted to stay. Not here in this place, but in the city. Now that she was with me, I wasn't frightened any more.

But she was pushing me toward the door through which I'd come in. She wouldn't listen to my protests. We never got to it. A muted buzzer sounded somewhere over our heads. It wasn't any louder than the sound a trapped fly makes in a bottle, but it made us both jump. And at the same instant the knob on the inner door that Jean had locked behind her began to rotate viciously. That same voice as before, the one that had sent cold chills through me, rasped angrily: "Jean, what're you doing in there? What's this door locked for? I need you out here — fast."

"Rosetti," she whispered sickly. "If he ever sees you —" Her grasp on my wrist was ice-cold.

She pulled me toward the side of the room so suddenly that I nearly went off-balance. There was a sort of built-in wardrobe occupying the entire side, with sliding doors that sheathed into one another. She clawed two of them apart, thrust me in against a welter of gold and tinsel dresses, then drew them together again. There was room enough to stand upright. Her panting, parting instructions came through the hair-breadth crack that remained.

"Stay in there until the coast is clear, then get out of here as fast as you can! If anyone should slide the

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doors open to take anything out, don't lose your head — shift with the doors and you'll be all right! Don't wait for me to come back, I mayn't be able to —"

I heard the sound she made unlocking the door, heard him bawling her out. "Take it easy, Rosetti. I had a run in my stocking," I heard her say placatingly.

I put my eye to the crack and got a look at him — or at least, a vertical strip of his face. He looked just like his voice had sounded.

"We're taking Masters into the argument room. Do a number and do it noisy, hear me? All *ta-ra*."

"Now?" she gasped, "with a place full of people?"

"That's what you're here for. Do your Western number." He gave one of the wardrobe doors I was behind a fling. I quailed, but managed to shift noiselessly behind it, out of the light that slipped in. I saw Jean's be-diamonded arm come plunging into the opening, take down a two-gallon cowboy hat from the shelf. Then she looped a lariat around her wrist, went over to a drawer, and took out a pistol.

Her face was very pale under the rouge. So was his, but for a different reason — not fear but malice.

She poised in the open doorway a minute. He signaled some musicians and they started an introduction. She gave her lariat a preliminary twirl, screeched "Yippee!" and shot the pistol into the air. Then she moved out of sight.

He closed the door after her, but stayed inside. He crossed swiftly to the outer door, the one that led to the service elevator, opened it, and let in a laundryman and his assistant, carrying an immense basket full of wash between them.

"Leave it here," he said. "Be ready for you in about ten minutes."

They went out again and he closed the door after them. Then he turned around and went out the other way. I saw his hand starting to grope into his coat as he pulled the door shut after him, as if he was taking out something. I heard somebody who must have been standing right outside waiting for him ask: "All set, boss?"

"All set," he answered, and then the door closed.

I waited a minute to make sure he wouldn't come back, and then edged out of the closet. Outside, in the distance, you could hear Jean's gun shots go off every once in a while. I opened the peephole on the outside door and looked through. The laundrymen were leaning back against the wall out there in the service passageway, waiting to take away the wash. I was wondering whether I should risk it and let myself out while they were there — whether they'd stop me — when without any warning the door behind me was flung open and a drunk came wavering in. He pulled the door shut behind him and leaned against it for a moment, as if trying to regain sufficient strength to go on.

He was a man in his early fifties,

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very handsome, with silvery hair. His collar and dress-tie were a little askew, the way a drunk's usually are. He'd had a flower in his buttonhole, but all the petals had fallen off, just the stem was left.

I was too frightened to move for a minute, just stood there staring stupidly at him. He didn't see me — he didn't seem to see anything. He forced himself away from the door that he had used to support him, came on toward where I was. I edged out of the way. Even then he didn't seem to be aware of me. His eyes had a fixed, glassy look and he walked in a funny trailing way, as though his feet were too heavy to lift.

He was holding a bunched handkerchief to his chest, over the seam of his shirt, and he kept giving a dry little cough. It seemed impossible that he hadn't seen me, but his eyes gave no sign, so I scuttled back behind the sliding wardrobe doors where I'd come from, and narrowed them once more to a crack, watching him fearfully through the slit.

His knees were starting to dip under him, but he kept on with painful, stubborn slowness toward that outer door, moving like a deepsea diver under many fathoms of water. It didn't look as though he'd ever get there. He never did.

Suddenly Rosetti's voice sounded behind him. He had come in with two other men. One of them closed the door behind him, locked it this time, and sealed it with his shoulder-blades in an indolent lounge.

"Trying to find your way out?" Rosetti purred. "This is the way out."

Flame slashed from his hand, a thunderclap exploded in the room, and the drunk was suddenly flat and still.

The man holding up the door chuckled, "No wonder he couldn't make it, all the lead he was carrying with him. I bet he gained twenty pounds in the last five minutes."

Rosetti opened the outside door, hitched his head. "Hey! The wash is ready!"

The laundrymen came in, picked up the big basket between them and dumped its contents all over the floor. A lot of towels and sheets and things came spilling out. They opened one of the sheets to its full width and rolled the "drunk" into the middle of it. Then they took his legs and forced them over until they touched his head, doubling him in two. Then they tied the four corners of the sheet together, into a big lumpy bundle. They put some of the laundry back into the basket, thrust the big bundle in the middle, and wedged some more down on top of it. When they got all through it didn't look much fuller than before, maybe a little plumper in the middle, that was all.

Rosetti looked it over. Then I heard him say, "There's a little starting to come through over on the side here. Jam a couple more towels in to soak it up. And don't forget the bricks when you get to the end of your route."

Then he sat contentedly back on

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the edge of the girls' dressing-table, swinging one leg back and forth. He took out a little stick of sandpaper and meticulously rubbed it back and forth over one nail, and blew on it.

"D'ya think anyone saw him come in?" one of the others asked.

Rosetti went to work on a second nail. "Sure, everybody saw him come in. And nobody saw him go out again, for sure. And it still don't mean a thing. Because nobody saw this part of it, what happened to him in between. I'll be the first one to go down to headquarters to answer their questions — before they even have time to call me. That's the kind of a public-spirited citizen I am!"

The three of them laughed.

Someone tried the doorknob from the outside just then and the one blocking it called out cheerfully: "Have to wait a few minutes, girls. We're holding a stag party in here."

The laundrymen were ready to go now, with their enormous burden suspended between them, shoulder to shoulder. One of Rosetti's two men accommodatingly opened the outside door for them. "Heavy wash tonight," one of them gasped as they staggered out.

"Sure," was the grinning answer, "we're dirty people up here. Didn't you know that?"

They closed the back door after them and put up all the chains. I was fighting to stay on my feet — at least, until they got out and went back where they'd come from. My head was swimming and my eyes were blurred; I was all weak at the knees; and I was afraid I wasn't going to be able to hold out and they'd hear me go down. I knew what was doing it, and it wasn't lack of air. The city hadn't taken long to teach me things. I knew I'd just seen a man killed before my very eyes.

I kept swaying from side to side like a pendulum, and each time braking my fall by clutching at one of the dresses hanging behind me. They were opening the door now — in another minute they'd be gone. But I keeled over first.

Maybe the noise from outside covered it, I don't know. They must have been clapping for Jean's number about then. I went down sideways into the narrow little trough I was standing in, and a lot of soft things came piling down on top of me, and everything went dark . . .

It seemed only a minute later that the sliding doors split open and light shone in on me once more. Jean was bending over me, helping me up. She had a street coat on now. She looked haggard. "I'm going to take you out with me," she whispered. "Lean on me."

The humming noise from outside had stopped now; there was a stony silence. She touched some cologne-water to my temple and it stung unexpectedly. I felt it and there was a welt there. "What happened?" I asked dazedly. "Did I do that when I fell?"

"No, I had to do that, with a slipper-

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heel, when you started to come to — with those three she-rats in here big as life. You'll never know what I've been through for the past half-hour or so! Luckily, I had a hunch something was wrong, and came back here just before the rest did. I couldn't get you out unconscious the way you were, and any minute I was afraid you'd come to and give yourself away. Every time one of them wanted something from back here, I'd jump and get it for her — they must have thought I was crazy. When I saw you starting to stir, I had to hit you, to keep you quiet until they got out of here. I told them I saw a bug on the closet-floor.

"Come on, the girls have gone home and the place has closed up for the night. The men are in the office counting up the take. Hurry up, before they miss me."

We staggered over to the back door together, and she started loosening the chains.

"I'm all right now," I said weakly. "I guess it was too stuffy in there."

We were out in the service passage now. She looked at me as if she didn't believe me. "What'd you see?" she asked sharply. "Are you sure it wasn't anything you saw while you were in there?"

Somehow I couldn't bring myself to talk about it, even to her. "Nothing," I said.

Riding down in the back elevator she turned aside, fumbled some more with her stocking, brought out another hundred-dollar bill. "Jimmy," she said, handing it to the operator, "you never saw this girl come here tonight."

"What girl?" he asked, when he was able to get his breath back.

"That's it exactly," she nodded, satisfied.

She took me somewhere to get some coffee to brace me up. Mostly, I guess, she tried to talk me into going back home. But nothing she could say had any effect on me. You know how it is when you're eighteen.

"No," I said. "I'm staying. If I can't stay with you, then I'll stay on my own."

She sighed. "I was like that once, too. That's why I wish you'd listen to me and go home. I don't want what happened to me to happen to you."

"What happened to you?"

She didn't answer.

"What was that place up there?" I asked curiously.

"Forget you were ever up there. Stay if you must, but promise me one thing — that you'll never go near there again. I'll find a furnished room for you and come around to see you whenever I can. And Francie" — her hand covered mine in desperate appeal for a moment — "if you did see something you shouldn't have up there tonight, don't ever open your mouth about it, don't ever mention it to a living soul — for both our sakes, yours and mine as well. Try to forget about it, that's the best way. I've seen things too, from time to time, that I've had to forget about."

"Why don't you leave there, Jean?"

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"I can't." She gave a wry smile. "I'm a little tired, and a whole lot disillusioned, but I still — want to go on living for a while."

I just sucked in my breath and looked at her when I heard that.

Late as it was, we went looking for a room then and there. I had to stay some place, and although she didn't say so, it was obvious that Jean lived right up there in that penthouse, as a sort of permanent resident-manager to look after Rosetti's interests.

We took a cab to save time on our quest, and passed Chalif-Bleekman's on our way. I looked out and thought, "There's my mascot." The lights in the shop window had gone out long ago, but you could still make out the mannequins, like ghosts in the dim shine of the streetlights. I asked her about the store.

"I used to work there when I first came here," she told me. "I'll take you in with me tomorrow; maybe I can get you a job there."

She found a room without much trouble. It was too late at night to be very choosey, and I was too dead-tired to care. Anything would have looked good to me by then.

The last thing she said was: "Now if you did see something, erase it from your mind. Always remember, there's nothing you and I can do about it. We're up against something that's too big for us."

To the end I couldn't bring myself to admit it to her. "No, I didn't see anything," I reiterated.

She knew I was lying, and I knew she knew. I heard her light step go down the stairs, and the taxi that had waited for her below drove off. Afterwards I found another hundred-dollar bill, the second one she'd given me that night, under the soap dish on the washstand.

It was only when I was half undressed that I realized I'd left the little bag with my few things in it in the back room of that place where she worked.

I was too tired to be as frightened as I should have been.

Her face paled when I first told her about it the next day. "It must have been found by now! There's a maid up there that's a stooge for Rosetti. Did anything in it have your name on it? Was there anything to show whom it belonged to?"

I tried to remember. "I don't think so —" Then my own face blanched. "Wait a minute. There was a snapshot of me in the flap under the lid, but without any name or anything on it —"

She'd got her second wind by now. "It's all right, keep cool. It's still not fatal. Here's our only out. If Rosetti asks me, I'll say some stray or other I used to know on one of my jobs showed up with a hard-luck story and tried to put the touch on me. She'd been put out of her room and she left her things with me. I slipped her something to get rid of her. As long as they don't think you were right there when —"

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I knew what she meant. *When the laundry was carried out.*

"— you're safe enough," she concluded.

She was as good as her word, and got me a job at Chalif-Bleekman's modeling negligées. Then she left me. "I won't be able to see you very often, after this once," she warned me. "Rosetti doesn't take chances with any of us, and he has eyes and ears all over town. I might be followed when I least expect it, and bring them down on you."

"If you want me in a hurry," was the last thing I said, "you can always meet me by the mannequin." I explained about the window mascot of mine. "I'll make it a point to stop there a minute on my way in and out."

That was the last I saw of her for some time, but I could understand her reasons for staying away, so I wasn't particularly worried. Meanwhile, I started to get the hang of the city a little better and lose some of my greenness.

They were nice to me at the place I worked, and the job was easy, after you once got over being self-conscious about walking up and down the aisles in nothing but lace and ribbons.

I made several girl friends, who worked there with me, and I also got myself a boy friend — my first. His name was Eddie Dent. He was a salesman in an auto showroom, and it looked like I'd hit the jackpot the very first time. But more about him later.

Although I grew wiser, I didn't forget my mascot. Even Eddie couldn't take her place. They'd put a new outfit on her long ago, since the night I'd first seen her, but I still stopped before her on my way in and out each day and told her all about how things were coming, and she still smiled in that same protective, encouraging way. She made blue days bright, and bright days brighter.

I was beginning to forget that nightmare scene I'd witnessed the first night of my arrival, and in a little while more it would have faded away like something that had never happened. Then suddenly it all came back with a crash. A succession of crashes, each one worse than the one before.

I'd brought a newspaper back to my room with me after work, and when I opened it a face seemed to leap up from its pages and strike at me. Handsome, with silvery-white hair. The laundry basket must have come apart. They'd picked him up out of the river.

*Well-known Sportsman, Missing Two Weeks, Found Dead*, the caption said. And underneath, my eyes ran through the welter of fine print, taking in a phrase here, a phrase there. ". . . Masters was known to have made many enemies in the course of his long career . . . his only son committed suicide less than a month ago after incurring heavy gambling losses . . . Police are trying to reconstruct his movements . . . Among those who came forward to aid them was Leo

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Rosetti, through whose cooperation they have been able to establish that one of the last places visited by Masters before he met his death was a small private party given by Rosetti at his own home. He was definitely absolved of all connection with the crime, however. Rosetti's first inkling of what had become of his friend of long standing was when he reported him missing after repeated attempts to communicate with him for the past two weeks had failed . . ."

They didn't guess. They didn't know. But I did. Jean and I both did.

I didn't sleep so well that night.

I put it up to the mannequin on my way in to work next morning. "How can I go on keeping quiet about it? Shouldn't I tell them?"

And her rueful smile seemed to suggest: "What about Jean? It means her life if you do."

That was the first crash.

When I clocked out that night there was a man standing there by my mascot — waiting for one of the other girls in the store, I guess. It meant I had to stand right next to him for a moment or two, while I was exchanging my usual silent confidences with her, but he didn't even seem aware of me.

I had a funny feeling, on my way home, that I was being followed, but each time I looked around, there wasn't anyone in sight — so I put it down to nervousness and let it go at that. The feeling wouldn't leave me, though, right up to my own door.

I'd been home about five minutes when I thought I heard a creak on the flooring outside in the hall. I stiffened, listening. It came again, nearer the door but less distinct than the first time. But no knock or anything followed.

I realized now that my instinct had been right. There had been someone following me all the way home, even though I hadn't been able to distinguish who it was. There was almost certainly someone standing out there now, motionless, trying to listen to me just as I was trying to listen to him. I tiptoed over, bent down, and put my eye level with the keyhole. Chilling confirmation came at once. My view was blocked. Instead of the opposite side of the hall, all I could see was a blur of dark suiting, standing there perfectly still.

The voice nearly threw me back on my heels, it came through so unexpectedly. The most terrifying thing about it was the casual, matter-of-fact tone he used, as though there were no door in between, as though I had been in plain sight the whole time.

"Come on, little lady, quit playing hide and seek."

Under a sort of hypnotic compulsion, I touched the key finally, gave it a gingerly little twist as though it was red hot, and he did the rest.

He came in slowly. It was the same man who had been standing outside the store. He had a funny little cowlick down the middle of his forehead, like a fish-hook, and it wouldn't stay back. I couldn't take my eyes off it.

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He closed the door after him. Then he heeled his hand at me, showing a glint of silver. He said: "You're Francine Everton, that right?"

I said it was.

He took out a newspaper and was suddenly holding Masters's picture before my eyes. "Ever see this man before?"

"No!" The sudden shock alone made my denial convincing, if nothing else.

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes!" If I said I'd seen him, I'd have to say I'd seen him killed. If I said I'd seen him killed —

"Who's the woman got you your job at Chalif's?"

So they'd found that out. I decided to bluff it out. It was the only thing I could do. "An acquaintance of mine. Her name is Edwards, I think. I don't know her very well. I ran into her on the street and told her I had no job."

It came with treacherous glibness. "When was the last time you were up there?"

Instinct, like a fine wire running through me, jangled warningly: "Make one admission, anywhere along the line, and the whole thing'll come out." I said, "Up where? What do you mean?"

"Then how do you explain this?"

Even more suddenly than the newspaper, he had opened an envelope and was holding a charred fragment of snapshot before me. Everything that didn't matter had been burned away. The face remained, yellowed but perfectly recognizable.

Sparring for time, I asked: "How'd it get burnt?"

He flicked back: "How'd it get where it got burnt?"

"I'd been put out of my room just before I met my girl friend. I had no place to go. She — took a little bagful of my belongings with her, to keep them for me until I found a place. She was supposed to bring them back, but she never did —"

"And you've never been up where she hangs out at any time?"

"Never. She didn't seem to want me to look her up —"

"I don't doubt that," he said dryly. It was suddenly over, to my unutterable relief. I'd thought it would go on for hours yet.

He got up to go. "Well, kid, maybe you're telling the truth and maybe you're not. Maybe you're afraid to." He got as far as the door, and then added: "Don't be afraid to. We'll look after you —" He waited a minute and then went on: "Are you sure there isn't anything more you want to tell me?"

"How could there be, when I've told you everything there is?"

He closed the door. It opened again, unexpectedly. "Armour's the name," he added, "in case you should change your mind."

It closed a second time and I heard the stairs creak complainingly with his descent. I turned and flopped down by the window, peeping under the drawn shade.

I saw him come out and look up, and then he went down the street.

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A figure detached itself from the shelter of a dark doorway opposite and started over toward the house I lived in. I knuckled the pane to attract his attention, threw up the lower sash, and called down guardedly: "Don't come in, Eddie. Wait for me around the corner."

It was my boy friend. I didn't want him to get mixed up in it. When I went out to meet him, I went all the way around the block in the opposite direction and approached the corner from the far side — a primitive precaution that wouldn't have fooled anybody if I was really being watched.

He said: "Who was the guy just up there to see you?"

I took his arm. "I'll tell you all about it. Let's get away from here first." I hadn't meant to say that. I only realized it after it was out. I couldn't tell him all about it. And then again — why not?

I waited until we were in a secluded booth in our usual Chinese restaurant. He said: "What's the matter, Francie? Is something on your mind? You don't seem yourself tonight."

It was so easy to get started, after that. What was more natural than to confide your troubles to your boy friend?

"He was a detective, that man you saw," I blurted out.

He wasn't as surprised as I'd expected him to be. He piled rice on my plate. "What'd he want with you?" he said.

"This man Masters they picked up from the river — he held his picture up to my eyes and asked me if I'd ever seen him before."

A forkful of chow mein halted halfway to his mouth.

"I said no, of course."

The forkful of chow mein went the rest of the way up.

"Then he asked me about — about a friend of mine named Jean Edwards, that got me my job. Asked me if I'd ever been up to her place. I said no, of course."

"Then what're you downhearted about? You gave him straight answers to straight questions. That's all there is to it. What's bothering you?"

"Nothing," I said muffledly.

He looked at me a minute or two. He scribbled something down on a scrap of paper and handed it to the Chinese waiter. I saw the waiter take it over to the bandleader. The music came around me, soft and persuasive.

*All your fears are foolish fancies*
*...aybe —*

Eddie stood up, held out his arms. "Come on, Francie, that's ours. You never could resist that number. It'll fix everything up."

I leaned my head against him as we glided around in the twilight dimness. "Feel better now?" he whispered.

"A little."

"Never mind, baby, it'll all come out in the wash."

I went out of step. "Oh, don't — don't use that word. I can't stand it —"

"Why?"

It got away from me so easily, like

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the tail of a kite, when the kite's already out of your hands. "Because it always reminds me of the way I saw him carried out that night —"

"Who, Masters?" He kept guiding me around softly in the shadowy crowd. "But I thought you said you weren't up there —"

"I told him that. But I was. I was hiding up there in a closet. I saw the whole thing happen. I can't tell you more than that about it, Eddie, because there's another person involved —"

The music ended and we went back to the booth. He had to make a phone call when the kumquats came on. It took him a little while, but he was smiling the same as ever when he came back. We didn't talk about it any more after that. I'd got it off my chest and I felt a lot better.

Instead of going on to a show the way we usually did, he took me back to my room. "You're tired and you ought to get a little rest, Francie."

"Suppose he comes around again?"

"He won't." He sounded strangely confident. "He won't bother you any more." Then he said: "I'll wait across the street until I see your room light go on, so you'll feel safer." Almost as though he knew ahead of time . . .

I went in and up the stairs and unlocked my darkened room. There were two messages under my door — a telegram and a phone message from Jean, in the landlady's writing — *Jean Edwards wants you to come up to her place at once, highly important.* Then when I opened the telegram, to my surprise that was from Jean too. Just five words — *Meet me by the mannequin.*

I ran to the window first of all, threw it up, signaled down to Eddie. "Eddie, wait for me. I have to go out again."

A large black car had drawn up a few doors down, and the driver had come over to him to ask for a light or something. I saw the two of them standing there chatting casually the way men do.

Then I stood there knitting my brows over the two messages. One contradicted the other. Maybe one was fake, but if so, which one of the two? Her words that first night rang in my ears again. "Promise me you'll never go near there again." Still and all, both could be from her and both could be on the level. Maybe something had happened to change her plans. Maybe she'd found out she couldn't get away, and had sent the second message to cancel the first. The thing was, which one had preceded the other? Well, there was a way of finding that out.

I knocked on the landlady's door. "Which of these came first — can you tell me?"

"The telegram," she said unhesitatingly. "I remember I'd just finished slipping it under your door, when the phone started to ring down in the lower hall, and that was for you too."

"Thanks," I said. Jean's place had it, then. The phone message was the one to go by.

I hurried outside to Eddie. The

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other man was gone now, but the car was still standing there.

"That was a guy I used to know," he began. "He said I could have the use of his car until he comes out again —"

I hardly paid any attention to what he was saying. "Eddie, don't ask me any questions, but — just come along with me, will you?"

"You bet," he agreed, the way a boy friend should.

We passed Chalif's on our way up to Jean's place. I was glad now that I hadn't taken the telegram at its face value. There was no one in front of the mannequin. Jean had changed her mind after sending it.

"Stop just a minute," I said, on an impulse.

"Why here? The store was closed hours ago —"

"No, you don't understand. I have a habit whenever I'm in trouble —"

"Oh, yeah. That mascot of yours. You told me about that once." He veered accommodatingly to the curb and braked.

I jumped out and went over, while he stayed in the car. The window lights were on, the way they were every night until midnight. She was in a different gown tonight. Then I remembered it was Thursday. They changed the window displays every other Thursday. They must have just finished dressing the window before we got there.

There was something about her face — A shock went through me as I halted before the thick plate-glass. *It was Jean's face!* I must be delirious, or losing my mind. She made a swift little gesture, hidden from the street. Touched one finger to her lips to warn me to silence. Then her hand stiffened into the mannequin's rigid wrist-bent pose again. I smothered a scream.

She remained motionless after that — all but her lips. I could see them wavering slightly. She was trying to say something to me. I watched them with desperate intentness, while she repeated endlessly, until I got it: "Don't — go. Don't — go. Don't — go."

"Come on," Eddie called impatiently from the car. "I thought you were in such a hurry to get wherever it is you're heading for."

"*Don't — go.*" The silent syllables kept pounding through the glass. She added an almost imperceptible shake of her head, invisible except to me.

"Are you coming? What's holding you up?"

"No," I said, hypnotized. I couldn't take my eyes off her face.

He got out, strode over to me, caught me roughly by the arm. "Why — what's the matter?" A sudden change had come over him — I couldn't quite identify it yet. He didn't waste a glance on the figure in the window. His back was to her. Over his shoulder I could see the warning shake of her head become frenzied.

"Then I'll give it to you right here — what's the difference where you get it, as long as we shut you up for good!"

The mask had fallen off, and I saw

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him now, for the first time, as he really had been all along. His face was now as repulsive as Rosetti's and those other men's. He had me trapped between two showcases, where the main-store-entrance was, and there wasn't a soul in sight on the streets to help me.

He cast a quick glance over his shoulder, as though trying to decide whether to risk the sound of a gunshot. Then, instead, he brought out something stubby, and it suddenly doubled its length in his hand. A wicked blade shot out of it right while he held it.

"So you saw Masters go out with the dirty wash, did you? Well, here's an extra mouth to tell it to the cops through — a mouth in the middle of your heart!"

A terrible game of puss-in-corner began between us. As I shifted from side to side, looking for an opening, he shifted in accompaniment each time, blocking me. I didn't dare take my eyes from that vicious knife feinting at me, but I was dimly aware of a flurry of motion behind him in the store window.

Suddenly I saw an opening — or thought I did. Maybe he gave it to me purposely. He had shifted over a little too far to one side. I darted for the avenue of escape like an arrow, flashed through — almost, but not quite. He swerved quickly behind me, his free hand shot out, clamped itself on my shoulder and pinned me fast. I could feel the flirt of air as the knife swept up. It would come down over me and plunge into my heart . . .

There was a flash inside the window beside me, a hollow thud, and pieces of glass fell out, leaving a jagged hole shaped like a maple leaf. A puff of smoke misted Jean's head and shoulders for a minute, then rose and disappeared. She hardly seemed to have moved at all. One hand, that had held a tinseled evening-bag until now, now grasped a snub-nosed revolver instead. Cottony smoke still licked from it.

The knife clattered to the sidewalk before my eyes. Then, horribly, his whole weight sagged against me from behind. I stepped forward, and he fell to the ground and lay there without moving.

Jean had disappeared inside the store. I was still cowering there, staring at his body, when she unlocked the front door and came out — still in the metallic wig she'd worn in the window.

"You poor innocent. Do you know who you picked for a boy friend? Rosetti's star banker. He presides at the main roulette table up at The Place every night. They must have sicked him on you purposely, to find out if you knew enough to be dangerous to them. And the minute he found out, he reported back to Rosetti.

"Luckily, I happened to get on an extension phone in the next room while he was making his tip-off call tonight. I had to reach you fast, and I didn't know how to do it. You were already out with the very guy that had fingered you. It was a cinch he wasn't going to let you out of his

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sight. Something you said last time I saw you came back to me. 'If you ever want me in a hurry and don't know where to find me, you can always meet me by the mannequin.'

"I got a hold of a gun and slipped out. I sent you a telegram to your room, and then I went over to the store. They were in the midst of dressing the windows when I got there, and the entrance had been left unlocked, so the guy supervising the work could slip out front and inspect the window every once in a while. That gave me an inspiration. I couldn't just wait for you on the open sidewalk. Eddie knew me too well. He would have spotted me and whisked you off with him before I had a chance to get in my warning. He was too good a triggerman to fool around with. I had to get the drop on him in some way.

"So I sneaked inside, unnoticed, and hid behind one of the counters until the window dressers had finished and gone. Then I opened the window, took out your mascot, changed clothes with her, fixed up my face and arms with some ochre powder I found in the store, put on her metallic wig, and stood there in her place, with the gun in my little jeweled bag.

"It was taking a big chance, until I had frozen into the right pose, but the streets are pretty quiet around here and no one passing by on the outside caught me at it. Then I had to hold the pose for what seemed like hours, and I thought you'd never come."

"What'll we do now?" I asked helplessly, looking down at the still form at our feet.

She shrugged. "I'll have to stay out of course, now that I've made the break, but it's just a matter of a day or two before they get the two of us. How can we buck a machine like the one Rosetti has got?"

"A detective named Armour — he was the one who questioned me — said if I ever had anything to tell him, he'd look after me."

"That's what they all say, but how can we be sure they're not taking presents from Rosetti on the side —"

"No, he was different. He was honest. You could see it in his face. He had a funny little cowlick down the middle of his forehead, like a fishhook, and it wouldn't stay back —"

"My God!" she exclaimed.

I said: "What's the matter?"

"Then they got him too, tonight. He must have been up there looking around for evidence single-handed, the fool! That proves he was honest, if nothing else. There was a guy with a cowlick drifting around from table to table, going through the motions of playing. I noticed him before I left. I could tell by Rosetti's face that they were wise to him, were getting ready to close in on him. Trixie was getting out the blanks and sombrero, to cover it up, when I came away. I bet he's already gone out in the wash!"

The prowl-car must have sidled up with its siren muffled. The first we knew about it was when two cops jumped out with guns drawn.

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Jean didn't waste any time — there wasn't any to waste. "O. K. I did this, and here's the gun. But if you've got any sense you won't stop to ask questions about this guy. He'll keep until later. Send in a call quick, for all the reserves they can spare. Do you two know a plainclothesman named Armour?"

One of them nodded. "Yeah, Danny Armour. He's attached to this precinct."

"Well, he's attached to the sky-patrol by now, but if you get up there in time you may be able to catch them red-handed with the body. Rosetti's gambling place — I'll take you in the back way."

One of them said in a low voice to the other: "He was up to something tonight. I saw him marking bills in the back room —"

The other one hitched his gun ominously. "We'll take a chance. Put in the call, Bill."

And so I got my first ride in a police radio-car.

We stopped around the corner from Jean's place. She led the way in through the delivery entrance.

What she asked the colored boy on the elevator should have been very funny. Somehow it wasn't, it was gruesome.

"Has any laundry been sent out from upstairs yet, Jimmy?"

He said: "Yes, Miss Jean. The truck just pulled away li'l while ago. Pow'ful big wash tonight, too."

"Too late," she moaned.

One of the cops with us said through his clenched teeth: "Dead or alive, he's still evidence. Hurry up, what'd that truck look like?"

"I've seen it. You can spot it a mile away," Jean snapped. "Ivory-colored, and all lacquered-up like a bandbox. It'll be a toss-up between the two rivers, though."

"Well, this is a westbound street, so we'll take the one it heads for!"

We climbed back in the patrol-car and tore off again. The cordon was beginning to form around Rosetti's place as we left.

That truck must have made marvelous time, to get all the way down where we finally caught up with it. But our ride was nothing short of maniacal. I wasn't able to draw a full breath from the time we took off.

We overtook it halfway to the lonely warehouse district along the waterfront, screeched a little too far past, nearly turned over, but managed to come up onto the sidewalk in the process. The two "laundrymen" were armed, but never had a chance to prove it. The cops were on them before they'd even finished staggering out. By the time Jean and I came up they already had the big basket of "wash" out on the ground and were ripping it open.

They kicked away the blood-spattered towels and pillow cases, and I saw his face by the pale arc-light. It was he, all right, the man who had come up to my room. The cowlick was jagged and stiff with blood now.

"He's still evidence, poor fellow," one of the cops said.

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"He's better than that!" Jean explained electrically, straightening up from bending over him. "There's still life in him, I just felt his heart! They were in too much of a hurry this time. Get him to a hospital quick, and you may still be able to pull him through!"

I'd thought we'd ridden fast on the first two legs of our trip but we had practically been bogged down compared to that stretch from waterfront to hospital.

I never thought I'd see that cowlick again, but I did — three weeks later, when Jean and I were taken down to the hospital. I even heard a voice come from under it. He was weak as a rag, but they'd pulled him through. The assistant D. A. who was going to prosecute Rosetti and his whole ring for murder was present at his bedside, to make the final arrangements with us. Jean was to be granted immunity for turning State's evidence as to the operation of Rosetti's many gambling establishments that she had presided over. I didn't need immunity to agree to testify to the murder of Masters, because I hadn't done anything.

I saw that cowlick all through the trial, sticking out stubborn as ever from under a huge gauze headbandage.

Rosetti has long since been just a blackout in a prison lighting-system, but I'm still seeing that cowlick.

I see it every Saturday night around 8, and sometimes during the week, when I answer the doorbell in the little flat that Jean and I have taken together. And it won't be long now before I'll be Mrs. Cowlick — Mrs. Armour to you!

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*FOR MYSTERY FANS* — these swiftly paced mystery-thrillers, all MERCURY PUBLICATIONS, are now on sale at your newsstand:

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*Number Four in our new series by Margery Allingham — another visit to the private bar of the Platelayers' Arms with our good friend Mr. Albert Campion and his good friend the Divisional Detective Chief Inspector, Charley Luke . . . Margery Allingham once described her writing technique as follows: "I write every paragraph four times: once to get my meaning down, once to put in anything I left out, once to take out anything that seems unnecessary, and once to make the whole thing sound as if I had only just thought of it."*

*It is an excellent system, and it does much credit to Margery Allingham's integrity as an artist. We wish all writers followed this quadruple technique — the resulting work would benefit enormously. But what of the poor devils (like your Humble Servants) who can't always manage it even after four shots at the goal? We would hate to confess how many times we have rewritten — how many times more than four — and still have not been satisfied that we had got the meaning down, with no words left out and no unnecessary words left in, and the whole thing sounding spontaneous and free and easy . . . But we are rambling again, and keeping you from another Tale of the Coppershop — about The Man With the Lunatic Face.*

## 2. THE CURIOUS AFFAIR ON NUT ROW

*by MARGERY ALLINGHAM*

"ALWAYS TAKE NOTICE OF A WOMAN," Divisional Detective Chief Inspector Luke said, casting a shameless glance at the very pretty girl who had come in with Mr. Albert Campion. Luke was in tremendous, not to say outrageous, form that evening and sat there on the narrow table in the upstairs private bar of the Platelayers' Arms looking like some magnificent black tomcat in his tight spiv clothes.

It was one of those raw spring nights when the city's traffic noises sound unnaturally close and there is a warning blast of freezing air whenever anyone opens an outside door. The rush hour was at its peak and it was just a little too early to go home — altogether the perfect time for story-telling.

"It was listening to a woman who could hardly speak, bless her, save to say 'yeth' which got me my first real promotion," Charley Luke was saying, and as we watched, he let his eyes slowly cross, blew out his cheeks into dumplings, and favored us with a simper which was so innocent and arch that the young person he was describ-



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ing seemed to appear right before us.

"She worked in a tobacconist's and paper shop just behind the old St. Mary's Road police station," Charley went on. "Her name was Mossy and she looked it — soft, you know, and green. She lived for the movies and thought I ought to be a film star. I used to go round and talk to her when old George 'Misery' Bull, who was the C.I.D. sergeant there in those days, got us both crying with the dreariness of life."

Luke gave us a fleeting glimpse of a sad, fat man with a forehead like a bloodhound's, and sketched in a vast and pendulous stomach with a fluid hand.

"It was a long winter that year and that brought out the lunatics," Charley resumed cheerfully. "The cold does, you know. At the end of September they start getting a grievance, by Guy Fawkes Night they're writing to the papers, and after Christmas they start coming to the police. I'm not kidding. If you feel it coming on, you want to watch out. Our particular headache that winter was Burbury Square. Do you know it?"

"The Society of Marine Research," murmured Mr. Campion whose knowledge of London was phenomenal.

"That's the place" — Luke shot him a swift, respectful glance — "on the north side: great tall houses all dust, stairs, and bad improvements. Geroge Bull used to call it Nut Row. It wasn't residential except for one or two hideouts in the attics." Charley bent his head smartly sideways to avoid an imaginary sloping ceiling, and automatically one or two other people did the same thing, his pantomime was so vivid. "At the time I'm talking of, there was only one old fellow actually living in the entire central block," he rattled on. "He was up under the roof in the house next door to the Society of Marine Whatnot and he had quite a snug little place there. But they were a fine old houseful; beneath him were the offices of a vegetarian magazine; under them a postage stamp exchange and, on the ground floor and in the basement, a collection of old ladies sorted bundles for the Solomon Islanders every afternoon except Saturdays. In the next house was this Marine outfit; they had the whole building, gave lectures and conducted a private war with their rivals, the Guild of Aquatic Science in Victoria."

Luke glanced round, his brows two circumflex accents. "You can see they were all a bit *funny*," he said seriously. "Even the Society — which is well known, you know, and quite the ticket — seemed to be going over the edge. They'd just got hold of a prehistoric fish which had landed them with a lot of publicity. It was older than the Coelocanth — that's the one without the lungs, isn't it? Well, this one hadn't got a stomach either. Just solid fish all the way through, or something of the sort."

Charley was not exactly depicting the unfortunate beast but a fleeting expression did suggest such an unhappy brute most graphically.

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"It was alive, too," he continued, the words pouring out of him as they always did when he grew excited. "I saw it myself. Some Chinese had got hold of it whilst he was doing his laundry in some sort of river they've got out there. It had been flown back at great expense and the Society was trying to keep it alive in a specially heated and polluted tank. They didn't exactly put it on show but they'd let you have a decko if you were interested and wanted to subscribe. The newspapers made a tale of it and a lot of people went to see. I knew about it because Sir Bernard Walsh, who was the President of the Society, had a row with Sir Thingummy Something who was the head of the Guild at Victoria. Sir Thingummy wanted to dissect the thing in the cause of science — which, of course, raised eyebrows on both sides. Finally I was sent down to explain to Sir Bernard why the Metropolitan Police didn't feel his pet needed a police guard unless he felt like paying for one. That's how I knew about the place and why the address wasn't new to me when we had the complaints from Mr. Theodore Hook on the roof next door."

"He was the man who lived over the vegetarian magazine?"

"That's right. We didn't know he was there at all until he telephoned one morning. As we listened to him we thought he couldn't be *all* there, and then, just about lunch time when he called in, we knew darn well he wasn't."

Charley paused, glanced sharply behind him, and came back to his audience with an expression in which belligerence and suspicion were quite horrifically blended.

"He complained of saucers," said Luke quite offhandedly.

"Oh, dear," protested Mr. Campion. "Not *flying* saucers, I hope."

"No error!" Charley's grimace confirmed the diagnosis. "He seemed to us to have it badly. We started off by thinking what a nice old boy he was — so polite and sensible — and then, just when we were eating out of his hand, an extraordinary expression came over his face and out it all came — Men from Mars. He didn't mind them himself, he said, but he couldn't think they'd do the country any good. The alarming thing was that he made it all sound very factual. According to him, sometimes they made a mass descent onto the roofs, sometimes they sat on the stairs outside his flat and wouldn't move, sometimes he only heard them making a wet sort of whistling which was their way of talking. He said they had globular eyes, scaly skin, and great splay feet like ducks, and all the time he had this insane look on his face."

"Poor fellow!" Mr. Campion spoke with feeling.

"Weren't we all!" Luke was unrepentant. "We had troubles of our own and after we'd heard the tale the third time and he began to telephone us in the small wee hours, the novelty wore off. We started to think we'd have to pull him in and that meant

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doctors and committal orders and angry relatives probably." Charley shook his dark head. "We made the well-known 'discreet inquiry' and the more we learned about him the stickier it looked. This Theodore Hook was a bit of a recluse but he was listed in all the reference books with a long string of letters after his name and he belonged to several of the better clubs. We waited but there were no other complaints, he kept his troubles for us. We didn't go round to his place but fobbed him off with promises — it was all we could do — and after the first few days we sort of got used to him. He became just one of those things." Luke sighed. "And then one day I went into Mossy's for some cigarettes and ran into Hook coming out. I was surprised because I hadn't seen him in the street before. I said 'Good evening,' but he only stared at my feet in his crazy way and bolted, leaving me slightly uncomfortable." Charley glanced down at his huge black shoes and grinned. "Quack, quack," he said, "that's all I was thinking when Mossy started up. I didn't listen to her at first but after a bit I heard her say, '*He was the surgeon and she didn't half look lovely: you could see his hand shake. It was in color and they were both green. Sinister it was.*' "

Luke gave a remarkable imitation of a soft, thick, London voice, trembling with remembered thrills, and there was an innocent glee in his bright eyes which was infectious. "That caught me," he said. "I don't know why and I said, 'Who was?' 'Why, *he* was,' she said; 'that man who's just gone out. He's an actor.' I said, 'Get away!' but she stuck to it. She said she'd seen him in the films and his name was Martin Treowen and he played small parts. 'He's always the one who's all strung up,' she said; 'he's in my annual — here I'll show you.' She did, too."

Luke's eyes widened to their fullest extent. "It took a bit of time but she got down under the counter and came up with the *Fan's Book of Faces*, and we went through it together. I didn't believe her, you know, but she found what she was looking for, a half-page illustrated article. I couldn't believe my eyes but there was no getting away from it. There he was, *Martin Treowen: The man with the Lunatic Face*. He was a character actor who specialized in neurotic parts and they gave a line of thumbnail portraits of him each showing him in different costume but all with the same unforgettable crazy expression. He was 'The Mad Surgeon' — 'The Insane Butler' — 'The Demented Executioner.' He'd made a study of it. As soon as he put on that peculiar expression of his, the least intelligent member of any audience understood at once that he was round the bend and nothing he said was reliable."

Luke began to laugh. "I was standing there gaping when Mossy lit a squib under me," he observed. "Suddenly she said: 'He's just finished a part, I expect, because he came in for a copy of *Stage Shop* — that's the

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paper they take when they're out of a job.' Blow me down! I didn't stop running!"

Charley rubbed his long hands together and the vigor of the gesture brought the bustle of the long-ago evening into the room with us.

"We got 'em all right," he said. "But it was touch and go because I couldn't get George to believe me at first. He thought we ought to go round to the flat and make contact with the real Theodore Hook first; but that would have been fatal. As Mossy had pointed out in her own way, there simply wasn't time. Finally George gave way and we did the thing properly. We had three men outside the building and my mate and I went into the Society's house and waited. At 2 in the morning they came up the fire escape — four of them — right into our arms."

"What *are* you talking about?" The pretty girl who had been watching Luke's excitement with growing bewilderment spoke involuntarily. "*Who* came up the fire escape? Where? What *for*?"

Luke beamed at her. "You've forgotten the Father of All Fish," he said happily. "The Guild wanted it; remember? The Society wouldn't part. So, strictly in the cause of science — as they carefully explained to the Magistrate — a party of interested young gentlemen decided to nip in and take it. They made the most elaborate preparations. The tank was twelve feet deep, so two of them had to wear suitable kit for the operation. By the time we got hold of them they didn't look at all unlike Men from Mars."

Mr. Campion took off his spectacles and his light eyes were interested.

"How very ingenious of them to employ the actor to prepare the ground!" he said. "The real Mr. Hook was the only witness who was almost certain to see them on the roof and his natural instinct would have been to telephone the police . . ."

"Who would have given him a rocket of which they would never — I repeat, never — have heard the last," put in the D.D.C.I. with relish.

"All because the simple minds of the police had been readied for just exactly that sort of call at exactly that sort of time by The Man with the Lunatic Face."

A smile narrowed Luke's wide mouth and he glanced at the girl.

"No one felt like advertising the way we had been taken in — nearly. That's why Mr. Martin Treowen was never prosecuted," Luke added. "We just rechristened him and filed him away for future reference."

The pretty girl took the cue Charley had offered. "Rechristened him?"

Charley's eyelids drooped, as if he were suddenly shy. "Maybe it's a sign of the times," he said bashfully, "but he's down in the records now as 'Treowen, Martin. Actor. B — E — M.' "

The girl took her cue again. "B — E — M?" she said, puzzled.

"Bug Eyed Monster," and Charley Luke's eyes bulged.

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## PRIZE-WINNING STORY

*Here is Rufus King's 'tec tintype of himself (to be taken with salt): "Having been strictly a bottle baby with a formula that called for distillate of arsenic in place of the more fashionable malted milk, it is small wonder that my career, after weaning, should have turned towards murder. Fondly, I remember my first secretary as having been my first victim. It goes without saying that she had a heart-shaped face, long, clean limbs, that all her curves were in the proper places, and she was stacked to an extent that would have shot the arrangements of old Fortress Monroe into a swelter of envy. To wit: a perfect, walking cliché.*

*"I have never married. Inevitably I would find it impossible to get beyond the engagement stage due to my then fiancée's funeral, or inquest, having always intervened just prior to that sad, lethal walk down the last (forgive me) aisle . . . So that is why, with the exception of some side excursions into beachcombing, silk manufacturing, war, the theater, stagnation, and the sea, my life has been one long delicious bath in nice, cold blood."*

*Now, bearing all this in mind (but still with a sprinkling of salt), we give you Rufus King's newest short story. Meet Mrs. Warburton Waverley, the little widow-lady who was selected as the "Most Civic Minded Woman of the Year" by the Halcyon-by-the-Sea Chapter of the Florida Federation of Women's Unions. How that bisque-doll of a woman got mixed up with such tough characters as "Stripe-pants" McSager and "Mouse" Kevin — well, that's the story, and we won't delay your enjoyment of it any longer.*

# 7. THE BODY IN THE POOL

*by RUFUS KING*

THE TWO EVENTS WERE RELATED . . . On June 15, 1952, Saul (Stripe-pants) McSager was electrocuted by the State of Florida for the murder of Mark (Mouse) Kevin. Both men had been regarded favorably for top billing on the Crime Hit Parade of their day.

Exactly one year later, on Monday evening, June 15, 1953, the Halcyon-by-the-Sea Chapter of the Florida Federation of Women's Unions gave



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a dinner in the Gulf Stream Room of the fashionable Driftwood Club. The dinner was in honor of Mrs. Warburton Waverley who had been selected by the Chapter as the county's "Most Civic Minded Woman of the Year." This was concretely attested to by the presentation of an orchid corsage and an engraved silver plaque.

Mrs. Waverley was a bisque-doll, childless little widow in her late fifties. You would say that anybody outside of an outright weakling could, with the most casual sort of ease and no physical opposition whatever, choke her neck until she was dead. She had no intimate friends, apparently no living relatives, and had made no effort toward acquiring acquaintances during the two years since she had settled in Florida. After the McSager trial, however, the circle of people who knew her expanded considerably.

The State of Florida had produced Mrs. Waverley as a surprise witness, having successfully kept her under wraps until the dramatic moment when she had taken the stand. This undoubtedly explained why she was still alive, inasmuch as two other state's witnesses (Rat Williams and his tomato, La Flamme) had disappeared before they had been able to testify. It was generally accepted that their disappearance was of a permanent nature and that they had presumably been present at a luncheon date with some alligators in the Everglades.

Actually, it was the rockpit that had started Mrs. Waverley on her road towards momentary fame — the plaque and honor being bestowed upon her because she had had the courage to risk her life by privately telling the prosecuting attorney what she had seen, and later publicly testifying to it in court.

The pit was in the rear of the house and grounds which she had bought some three miles to the west of Halcyon-by-the-Sea: a sufficient distance inland to insure restful privacy from the overloaded beach, an elimination of sand flies, and an avoidance, when driving at night, of the crunch beneath the tires of land crabs with their nauseating reek. The formation of the pit was similar to any of the numerous rockpits which dotted the general area around Greater Miami and along the Federal Highway towards the north.

It formed a natural swimming pool, being quite large and deep, and filled with water of an intense cerulean blue that contrasted in beautiful sharpness with the pit's white crushed edging. It sat in a landscaping of cocoanut palms, avocados, thornless Key limes, and several fine Ficus Exotic shade trees, with the usual clumpings of bougainvilleas and pink hibiscus . . . a highly exotic spot indeed for the unceremonious dumping by McSager of Kevin's hastily weighted body.

The grounds of McSager's Ranch Club (by far the most exclusive gambling setup in the county) ad-

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joined Mrs. Waverley's home on the east. That was why McSager had hit upon her rockpit as the handiest repository for Kevin's hot corpse for which circumstances had compelled an immediate disposal, personally handled by McSager, without any of the usual careful planning and cement trimmings. He never dreamed that a delicate old shadfly like Mrs. Waverley could still swim, and, furthermore, would have the habit of taking a before-breakfast plunge every morning.

Another of Mrs. Waverley's habits that McSager was unaware of was her 2-o'clock-in-the-morning strolls. She indulged in them both for lonely contemplations of the past and because of chronic insomnia. It was during such a stroll that she had been an eye-witness, from behind the shelter of some bougainvilleas, to the watery interment job.

Now, Mrs. Waverley was not a chump. All her life she had weighed the pros and cons of a thing before leaping, and she gauged pretty accurately (very accurately, as the fate of Rat Williams and La Flamme later proved) what would happen to her if her knowledge of the body-dumping reached McSager's ears before that worthy gentleman could be effectively immunized from muzzling her tongue. So she returned, that night, from the rockpit scene to her empty house, locked herself in securely, made the inevitable pot of coffee — she claimed that it put her to sleep — drank two cups of it, and went to bed. The house was not a large one, being of the popular concrete-block-and-stucco single-floor construction, with three bedrooms, two baths, a living room, kitchen, screened patio, and a closed garage for the Packard convertible which she drove herself.

Night-times she occupied the house alone. A colored maid came in during the days, and a man showed up once a week to trim the stretches of Bitter Blue sod and to keep the flower beds in shape. The few people who did know her often speculated as to why she hadn't married again, since she had all the attractions of good looks, wealth, and an agreeably pleasant disposition. After wringing the problem dry, they finally attributed her fetish for lonely privacy to a fondness for her late husband, Warburton, which evidently lingered beyond the grave.

After five hours of sleep Mrs. Waverley woke up with no fuzzy fringes and with a clear consciousness of the earlier morning events at the rockpit. She put on a swim suit, sandals, a terry cloth robe, and went outside through the kitchen door, leaving it unlocked for Maybelle, the maid, who would show up shortly, at 8 o'clock.

Maybelle was deposited at the house by her husband on his way to work on a construction job over on 7th Avenue. She was a strongly built young woman, her strength being deceptively hidden under dark satin skin; she had a slow sort of

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dignity in all her movements and was taciturn by nature.

She poured a half-tumblerful of sherry, drank it down in the fashion of a water thirst-quencher, raised the Venetian blinds in the living room, opened wider the louvers of its jalousies to the marvelous morning air and mounting sun, then started making the coffee that Mrs. Waverley always wanted to be ready for her on the patio when she returned from her morning swim.

The daily routine was altered this morning by Mrs. Waverley herself who did not go out to the patio but came directly into the kitchen instead.

"Good morning, Maybelle."

" 'Morning, Mrs. Waverley."

"Tell me whom I ought to telephone. There's a body in the rockpit. It's a man and I think he's anchored, or something, down on the bottom. I brushed against him when I dove in."

Whatever Maybelle felt about the news did not rise to the surface of her habitual imperturbability. Bodies in rockpits were not an uncommon occurrence; usually they were of small children who used the pits to swim in even though the police were constantly warning parents on radio, TV, and in the press to keep their children away.

"Dead?" asked Maybelle impassively.

"I feel quite sure of it, and I'm certain too that it's late for any resuscitation. As I said, he's anchored. Whom should I notify?"

"The sheriff's office. You want me to call?"

"Yes, do, please."

"Mister Budd will be on duty now."

Two road patrolmen, notified by radio-telephone while cruising on 7th Avenue, drove up first and met Mrs. Waverley on the patio. She had changed from her swim suit to a frock of cotton printed in a bamboo design. She led them to the rockpit where they could just make out a darker blob below the water's deep blue.

Mister Budd from the Sheriff's office joined them on the pit's rim, stripped off his flamingo-patterned shirt, his shoes, socks, and the slacks under which he wore his swimming trunks, and dove in. The sun was high enough by now to slant the tops of the shade trees and shower a golden light down into the blue, coppering Budd's husky young body into the warm Zuloaga flesh tones that Mrs. Waverley admired so in the Hispanic Museum.

Budd seemed to stay down quite a while with that timelessness that characterizes a Florida day; then he came up and said to one of the road men, "I'll need a wire clipper, Frank."

Frank walked to the patrol car and got one, giving it to Budd who sank again for quite a while, and then, giving it a heave, popped Kevin's body surfaceward where Frank and Jimmy hauled it onto the pit's crushed white edge.

"It's Mouse Kevin," Jimmie said.

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"Yes," said Frank.

"Yes," said Budd.

"A friend of yours?" Mrs. Waverley asked.

"No, ma'am," Budd said with his pleasant soft slur. "You could call him a business rival, I guess, of your neighbor, Mr. Saul McSager."

The grounds filled up: an ambulance, the medical examiner, Mr. Jepson the county attorney, the county investigators, reporters from the Miami, Ft. Lauderdale, and Halcyon papers, and some on-the-spot-coverage by the Ft. Lauderdale and Miami television stations.

Mrs. Waverley (she had politely declined to change back into her swim suit for the cameras, but she did consent to posing with a finger pointing down to the waters of the pit) managed to single out the county attorney and lead him to the privacy of a latticed gazebo. They sat down and she said, "Just what protection can you guarantee me, Mr. Jepson?"

Jepson waved an inquisitive wasp from the vicinity of his face.

"Against what? Against whom, Mrs. Waverley?"

"Against reprisal. Against being silenced before I could testify in court."

The lassitude of the day and the scent of nearby gardenia flowers were like a drug.

"You saw it done?"

"The killing? No. But I saw Mr. McSager put the body into the pit."

"You could make a positive identification?"

"Yes."

She told him why, and he asked courteously why she hadn't notified the sheriff's office at once. She explained that she had been afraid to, saying that she had been torn between fear and civic duty. Jepson told her that he quite understood, and it was arranged that she and her dangerous but invaluable knowledge should be kept under wraps.

The months passed, the trial passed, and more months passed; the appeals were denied and the governor's clemency was withheld; Saul McSager was electrocuted and still another year passed; and the tables in the Gulf Stream Room of the Driftwood Club were decorated with floral arrangements of coral gladioli and gold pompons.

Mrs. V. W. Harris, First Vice-President of the Florida Federation of Women's Unions, wearing a pink (the high-fashion shade for that spring) ballerina-length gown of organdy, presented the silver plaque to Mrs. Waverley, who was wearing a smart black dinner dress with black net-illusion neckline, a three-strand choker of pearls, and the corsage of white orchids that had been given to her during pre-dinner cocktails in the Triton Lounge overlooking the sea.

By 11 o'clock all the goodbyes had been said and Mrs. Waverley headed her convertible westward along the flat, pine-toothed stretches of the Halcyon Boulevard — headed for home whose peaceful serenity

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always wrapped itself around her like a kindly shawl. After garaging the car she went into the quiet house, chained the front door, clicked the percolator on for her coffee, then tried the kitchen door to see whether Maybelle, as she so frequently did, had neglected to lock it. Maybelle had neglected, so Mrs. Waverley turned the key and set the chain.

She carried her coffee cup into the living room and placed it on a low table near the fireplace, on the mantel of which she had put the silver plaque where she could look at it and enjoy it. A dog barked fitfully from over towards 7th Avenue, drearying the hush of night with an overtone of soft-padding dangers.

*Was* it the barking of the dog that gave her such a thought on this night of her peculiar triumph? Or was it the dread basis for the triumph itself? Could you build a triumph on the sort of death an electrocution brought to a man? Didn't their teeth shoot out of their mouth, all around the room, when the current was turned on?

She wondered where she had picked up that bit of information. Oh, yes, during the trial one of the men assigned to protect her had told her about it. It was oppressive, appalling really, now that she had localized it, this feeling about padded dangers. The silver plaque began to lose its taste.

The teeth obsessed her with a mental picture of their spattering and, in particular, Saul McSager's teeth. He had been a strong man, a virile, handsome man, with that darkling blood of the courteous buccaneers. Mrs. Waverley had never met him nor had she ever gone to the Ranch Club, since any form of gambling struck her as being plain stupid; but they would bow to each other when occasionally their cars had passed.

She thought that tonight she would skip the 2 o'clock stroll as she was tired enough to go straight to bed without it. She carried her cup into the kitchen for one final cup of coffee. Having poured it, her eye hesitated on the kitchen door. She was certain she had left the key in the lock, but the keyhole was now empty. The feeling of padding feet behind her became even stronger, and suddenly Mrs. Waverley felt real fright, personal fright. She wanted instantly to get out of the house.

As a camouflage to mask her tightening fear, to lend a semblance of naturalness to her walk, Mrs. Waverley carried the coffee cup with her as she returned to the living room. And there she saw a strange young woman sitting in her chair.

She had been expecting Heaven knows what — but not that. A prowler, perhaps, but never this well-dressed, exceedingly pale, well-bred looking young woman. With a chillingly pat significance the dog over towards 7th Avenue started barking again.

"It's one of the very few things that irritate me down here," Mrs.

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Waverley said. "That meaningless barking. The people who own the dog must be very insensitive, quite common really, don't you think?"

"Oh, definitely," the young woman replied. "I agree with you, Mrs. Waverley. And before you bother to say that I have the advantage of you, I'm Elsa McSager — Saul's daughter."

Elsa's bleak eyes settled on the silver plaque, and Mrs. Waverley glanced at the front door. Its key was gone, too. She placed the coffee cup on the table and drawing up a chair, sat down. Did the girl know, Mrs. Waverley wondered, that her father's teeth would have spattered?

"I suppose, Miss McSager, that you simply walked in after Maybelle left and have been waiting here?"

"Yes. In a bedroom."

"Why?"

"To have our own anniversary celebration. To kill you, Mrs. Waverley."

"Ah."

"And don't give me that old bromide about not being able to get away with it because I can." (She is very young, Mrs. Waverley thought; not over eighteen.) "I have an absolute alibi arranged and not a soul on earth knows that I am here."

"What school did you go to, Miss McSager? Sturdevant Hall?"

"Why, yes, I did. How did you know?"

"The inflection of your voice. It's rather a hallmark of the place. Naturally your father would have selected it for you. Will you join me in some coffee?"

"That," Elsa said with deadly bitterness, "will be just George."

George, Mrs. Waverley decided, must be a modern version of peachy in the changeful jargon of youth. Miss McSager made no effort to follow her into the kitchen — the door keys being undoubtedly in her possession; but with the insulting assurance of strong youth, with its upper hand against old frailty, she could sit indifferently, biding her time, savoring it, until she was ready to strike.

Mrs. Waverley returned to the living room and put a cup of steaming coffee on the table.

"Now if you will pardon me for a moment, Miss McSager —"

"Don't bother going for the gun in your night-table drawer. It's here in my bag."

"Naturally you would have looked."

"Naturally."

"Sugar?"

"Please. One lump. No cream."

"That detestable dog again!"

"He shan't bother you much longer."

"No, I daresay not. You must have loved your father deeply. Will you think it queer if I say that I admired him? His attitude — well, of manliness — during the trial?"

"Queer? Very queer."

"Well, the fact is I did. Miss McSager, why have you waited until now?"

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"I'll tell you, if you can understand it."

"I will try."

"Anything like this needs the final impetus — like the click of the hammer that sets the charge off in a gun after it's been loaded, after it's been sort of dormant a long time. I guess that testimonial plaque up there was the click."

"I see."

"I wonder."

"Oh, but I do. Then Sturdevant-Hall, of course."

"What about it?"

"They asked you to leave, didn't they?"

"They did. I've no doubt they fumigated it after I'd gone."

"You're really enjoying this, aren't you?"

"You have no idea how much."

"I think I have. Power. That God-feeling. Vengeance is yours.

"My interest is purely academic, Miss McSager, but do you intend to leave me here? My body, to be blunt about it."

"In the house? No. Your maid will find you in the rockpit. You will have struck your head against a submerged rock while diving, have lost consciousness, and drowned." She added with a cruel kind of negligence, "Nothing messy."

"You'll feel better when this is over."

Elsa lapsed into the sarcasm of the young.

"You're very understanding."

"Well, I've lived. I've known life and death and, to a measure, love. Would it surprise you to know that I have had seven husbands?"

Elsa looked at Mrs. Waverley as though the old wraith were a freak.

"It certainly does surprise me!"

"Each was quite different, you know. The first three were Lonely Hearts — that mail-order club sort of thing, object matrimony. With the later four one could be more selective, having a foundation to stand on, you might say. They did have a few things in common, of course, such as each being heavily insured and each being reasonably rich, and each having a wish, as I always told the various attending physicians, that their bodies be cremated. I still arrange to have flowers on their graves even though they *are* scattered all over the country."

Mrs. Waverley glanced at an ormolu clock on the mantel beside the silver plaque. Twelve minutes had passed. A clinical look at Miss McSager reassured her that total loss of muscular coordination was on the point of setting in, and several concealing hours of dark remained before the sun would transform the rockpit's waters into their beautiful cerulean blue.

"Finish your coffee, Miss McSager." Mrs. Waverley leaned forward for a judicious look at the contents of Elsa's cup. "Although it really doesn't matter. I think you have already swallowed enough. Does — tell me, dear — does your mouth tingle?"

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*Once upon a time — it seems many years ago — Joseph C. Lincoln was positively your Editors' favorite author. We read every book of Mr. Lincoln's we could find, and each new one that came out. We had a deep and abiding affection for his Yankee humor, for that wonderful Cape Cod background, and for those salty, philosophical characters — the old sea Cap'ns, the fishermen, the lighthouse keepers, the odd-job handymen, the sharp-tongued New England spinsters and widows, and, of course, the "cracker-box oracles in the village stores." But though our memories over the years have not faded in spirit, we did not recall that Joseph C. Lincoln ever wrote a short story in the mystery-crime field — which merely goes to prove how much we can trust our memory. For Mr. Lincoln did dabble in crime and detection, and we now bring you the tale of three American millionaires vacationing at the Old Home House (Barzilla Wingate, Prop.) and making like modern Diogenes(es) — looking for an honest man. You think it is easy to find an honest man? Don't bet on it . . . and we will have more to say after you have finished this story of "Cape Cod Folks," whom Hamlin Garland once described as "a joy" to read about.*

# 8. THE MYSTERY OF THE POCKETBOOK

*by JOSEPH C. LINCOLN*

I WAS LOAFIN' ALONG DOWN THE path that leads from the Old Home House to the beach and boat landin' when I heard a hail comin' from somewheres off my starboard bow.

"Wingate! Hi! Wingate!"

I swung around and there they was, the four of 'em, settin' in what Cap'n Jonadab calls the "rusty harbor," meanin' the two uncomfortable benches made out of birch logs, with the knots and bark on, that Peter T. Brown had set up on the edge of the bluff overlookin' the bay. The "Rustic Arbor," Peter named it, and 'twas a great place for boarders, especially young ones in assorted couples.

But the crowd whose heads I could see stickin' up over the Arbor bushes wa'n't that kind of assortment, not by no manner of means. There was Ebenezer Dillaway, who runs the New York Consolidated Cash Stores and is Brown's wealthy pa-in-law. And a little, meek-faced boarder man by the name of Ezra T. Smith, who hailed from a place called Peasley,

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Indiana, and who told everybody that he'd had money left him, and was cultivatin' society. And old Hannibal Boscoe, from Pittsburgh, who was so rich that champagne disagreed with him and he could afford to tip the waiters. And Anson Hedgegrave, from Chicago, who was likewise rich, but round and fat and jolly. That was the crew mannin' the "rusty harbor" at that minute, and I wondered what on airth they wanted of me.

I walked up the slope and rounded the bushes. They was settin', two and two, on the benches, and a table was between 'em with cards on it.

"Mornin', gentlemen," says I, "havin' a little game, was you? Hope you don't want me to take a hand. All I know is casino and seven-up and I wouldn't swear to them without further evidence."

Hedgegrave laughed. "No," he says, "we've had all the cards we want for the present. Been teachin' Smith here to play poker. He's a promisin' pupil. Ho! Ho!"

Teachin' Smith! *Teachin'* him! Same as the whale taught Jonah to play hide and hoot! Why, that little green landlubber stood as much show with that gang of pirates as a stray canary on a cat farm. I looked at him, pityin', but, would you believe it, he was all excited and happy.

"It was a new experience for me, Mr. Wingate," he says. "It was, really! I never played cards for money before. Really I never did. I — you will excuse me for bein' personal — but I was rather strictly brought up — raised, that is — and I am only beginnin' to see the world. Yes! I won forty-three dollars. I held four — four somethin's all alike and —"

"You held four Jacks, that's what you held," broke in Boscoe, disgusted; "and I was another for goin' up against 'em with three bullets. But never mind that, Wingate. That's off the subject. We want you to get us a pocketbook."

"A pocketbook!" I sings out. "*You* want *me* to get you —"

"An empty one, that's all," puts in Hedgegrave, with another laugh. "Is there a shop around here where we could get a good-sized pocketbook? We've been havin' a discussion, and we want to try an experiment."

Well, I thought for a minute and told 'em that I cal'lated if we sent one of the hotel boys up to Cahoon's store at the Centre he would most likely find some sort of a purse. "That is," I says, "provided Cahoon ain't 'all out, but expectin' some in every day,' which is one of his habits. How good a pocketbook do you want?"

Didn't make no diff'rence. Any kind would do, so 'twas big and prosperous-lookin'. I was curious enough to find out what they wanted of it, and, after the boy had gone, they told me.

Seems, when the card playin' was over, they'd got into the dickens of an argument concernin' honesty. 'Twas Smith started it, all innocent as usual, but intimatin' that he didn't know's he'd ought to keep his poker winnin's. "Seem's if I hadn't — well,

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you'll excuse me, gentlemen — I mean as if I hadn't got an honest right to it," he says.

"Bosh!" snorts Boscoe. "Don't talk that way, Smith. This ain't a young people's meetin'. Honest right! I tell you honesty these days means gettin' away with the goods and not bein' caught at it. If the average man sees a chance to get his hands on a dollar he's goin' to do it, and keep 'em there as long as he can; that goes, whether he's a parson or a bartender."

Ebenezer Dillaway he agrees with Boscoe, which is unusual, as them two was rowin' most of the time. "You're dead right," he says. "Look how we have to do in business."

Hedgegrave gives in that there's considerable dishonesty in the world, but some honesty, too — in spots.

"That's very true, sir," puts in Smith. "In my general store at Peasley, Indiana, I had a clerk who was the very soul of honesty. Why, he —"

But nobody paid any attention to him, of course, and Boscoe comes back with more arguments to prove the general and necessary crookedness of everything. Then Hedgegrave says that the rural districts is the place for honesty. In the cities a man is more or less obliged to get ragged in his morals, but in the country the old sterling virtues don't wither so early.

"Oh, nonsense!" hoots Ebenezer. "I wouldn't trust the gang down around here with ten cents, if they saw a chance to steal it safe. Do you mean to tell me, Hedgegrave, that if you lost money around this place you'd expect to have it returned?"

Well, Hedgegrave thought 'twas an even risk that he would. Boscoe and Ebenezer laughed at him and the talk got hotter. Finally Hedgegrave says:

"Look here," he says, "why not try it? Let's risk an experiment. S'pose we put some bills in a pocketbook and leave 'em by that path over yonder. Then we'll watch from here and see who goes down the path. If the pocketbook's gone we'll know who found it, and we can wait and see whether he tries to locate the owner or keeps it and says nothin'. 'Twill be fun, anyway the cat jumps, and the mercy knows we need some excitement these dull days. What do you say?"

They all said yes, of course. That is, all but Smith, and nobody minded what he said. 'Twas enough of a gamble to tickle Dillaway and Boscoe right down to the ground. But when it come to gettin' a pocketbook they was stuck, for a minute. They all had one, of course, but all but Smith's had the owner's name stamped on it. Smith, he hemmed and hawed and finally says he don't know's he'd like to risk his wallet 'cause 'twas give him by his Aunt Emilia, the one that left him the money, and he set considerable store by it. Then 'twas suggested that they buy a new one, and when I happened along they hailed me.

We had to wait quite a spell for the boy to get back from Cahoon's, and while we was waitin' Hedgegrave goes up to the hotel. He didn't stay

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but a few minutes, and just as he reached the Arbor on his return trip the boy trots in. He'd bought a big, long pocketbook, one of the kind with a strap around the outside.

"Cahoon had a whole dozen of 'em, just alike," he pants. "Brand new and just come by express. They was thirty-five cents apiece, but I didn't s'pose you'd mind the expense."

We didn't, and after he'd gone Hedgegrave reaches into his jacket and fetches up a stack of greenbacks — nice new bills.

"Boys," he says, "here's a hundred and fifty dollars. That's enough, ain't it?"

Smith's mouth fell open, and I guess mine did, too.

"My dear Mr. Hedgegrave!" says he. "My *dear* sir! You don't mean to risk one hundred and fifty *dollars* in such a —"

"Hush up!" snaps Boscoe, irritable. "I guess it's enough, Hedgegrave. No use havin' any less."

"No," says Ebenezer. "They might return a dollar and a half, but one hundred and fifty dollars is a livin' for life in this forsaken neck of the woods. But 'tain't right for you to put up the whole stake, Hedge. Let the rest of us in, won't you?"

No, he wouldn't. Said 'twas his suggestion and he was willin' to take the chance.

"Besides," he goes on, winkin', "I'm bettin' it'll be returned. When a reward's offered, anyhow."

He puts the bills in the new pocketbook, and out we go, the five of us, and drops the thing at the side of the path leadin' to the boat landin'. The place where we dropped it was just out of sight from the Arbor, down the slope a ways, at the edge of a clump of bushes and hid in a little in the grass.

"There!" says Hedgegrave, grinnin'. "I consider that a very workmanlike job. Nothin' too plain nor yet too much concealed. Layin' just casual and incidental, as if separated from Hetty Green or a head waiter by force of circumstances. Come on! Let us seek our sylvan retreat and pipe the passer-by."

So we hurried back to the Arbor and through. Everybody was excited and eager, but little Smithie was the most of all. He was so tittered up he couldn't set still and his eyes was poppin' behind his specs. This was the real thing! *This* was seein' the world with a vengeance! 'Twas plain enough they didn't heave money around so in Peasley, Indiana.

"S-sh-sh!" breathes Ebenezer. "Some one's comin'."

We scooched down, and kept still. Some one *was* comin', sure enough! For a second we didn't scarcely breathe. Then around the bend swung Zach Simmons, the young feller who was actin' as skipper for the *Rosie*, the catboat old Boscoe had hired for his own special use that summer. Boscoe was a great chap for sailin', and him and Dillaway — who was likewise fond of the same things and owned a catboat named the *Mallard* — raced about every other day. First

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the *Rosie* would win and then the *Mallard*, and Boscoe and Dillaway was vainglorious or doleful, turn and turn about. Dillaway's skipper was old man Zenas Gill. When the two millionaires wa'n't quarrelin' over whether the *Mallard* or the *Rosie* was the best sail*er* they was fightin' out whether Zach or Zenas was the best sail*or*. Each swore by his own man and at the other feller's.

Well, Zach come swingin' along the path, whistlin' and happy — as he'd ought to be considerin' the wages and tips he got from Boscoe — turned the corner and disappears behind the bushes where the pocketbook was. We waited for three minutes longer. Then says Dillaway, quiet and sarcastic:

"Humph! Well, if *that* feller found it you'll have to call in the police, Hedgegrave. *He'll* never give it back of his own accord."

"Is that so?" snarls Boscoe, bristlin' up. "If there is one absolutely honest man in these parts his name is Zacheus Simmons. You're in luck, Hedge."

"Gentlemen," puts in Smith, fidgetin', "may I suggest — don't you think we'd better go and see if he did find it?"

He was startin' toward the bushes when I grabbed him by the coat tails.

"Hush!" says I, earnest. "Scooch down again, quick! Here comes somebody else."

We hushed, and when I see who 'twas this time, I pretty nigh laughed out loud. Zach Simmons, Boscoe's skipper and pet, had been the first. Now who should heave in sight but old Zenas Gill, Ebenezer's partic'lar salt-water idol. 'Twas plain enough that, as Hedgegrave had said, whichever way the cat jumped there'd be fun. I could smell brimstone already.

Zenas was moonin' along, rubber boots on his feet, sou'wester on the back of his head, and a pipe in his mouth. He didn't stop a second, but went clodhoppin' down the slope and in behind the bushes. One minute, two, three — then Brother Ezra Smith couldn't stand it no longer. Out he jumps, nervous and skippy as a sand flea, and races after Zenas. In another jiffy back he comes, wild and stary.

"Gentlemen," he whispers, hoarse, and holdin' up both hands, "it's gone! The pocketbook's gone!"

We run to see for ourselves, but he was right. The new wallet and the one hundred and fifty dollars was gone.

Anson Hedgegrave chuckled.

"So far so — bad," says he. "Now for the Diogenes' honest-man hunt!"

Boscoe pulled his whiskers. "Ugh!" he remarks, casual. "Well, Hedge, you've got one chance. If Cap'n Zach picked it up you'll get it just as soon as he can locate the owner. But if that Gill scamp got *his* hands on it, then —"

"Bet you fifty dollars he returns it," put in Ebenezer, quick as a flash.

"Take you!" comes back Hannibal, just as quick. "Just because that mud scow of yours, Dillaway, got advantage of a lucky breeze while our boat

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was becalmed you let that Gill lobster-back fool you to death. I wouldn't trust his honesty any more'n I would his seamanship. Why —"

"That'll do!" snaps Dillaway, reddenin' up. "Hedgegrave, you and Wingate witness this, will you? I'll double my bet. I'll bet a hundred even that if Cap'n Zenas found that book he returns it inside of two days."

"Go you!" roars Boscoe. "And I'll bet the same on Cap'n Zach."

"I — I'll witness it, gentlemen," declares Smith, rubbin' his glasses for joy. "I give you my solemn word that I witness it."

Nobody asked *him* to witness nothin', but they let it go at that.

The two days went by, and two more after it, but not a word came from the finder of that pocketbook. Old Boscoe and Dillaway both declared they'd won the bet, but they couldn't either of 'em prove nothin', of course, so things stood just as it was. 'Twas rainy weather, and the crowd put in their time playin' cards inside. Smith told me about it.

"They are most interestin' people, Mr. Wingate," says he. "*Most* interestin'! All men of affairs, men of the world. To be with them is a liberal education."

"Yes," says I, lookin' at him sideways, "I presume likely that's so. But some kinds of education are expensive, they tell me. You been playin' cards with 'em, have you?"

Why, yes, he had. They had been kind enough to teach him more about poker and such games.

"I — I — as I said, Mr. Wingate," he goes on, "I have had little opportunity for such little amusements in my home life in Peasley. My store kept me busy and —"

"How much have you lost so fur?" I interrupts.

"Well," he says, blushin' some, "I *am* a — a trifle behind the game, Mr. Wingate. I believe I have lost — er — seventy-three dollars and seventy-five cents altogether. But Mr. Boscoe and Mr. Dillaway both assure me I shall have my revenge later on. Luck is bound to change, you know."

"Um — yes, maybe," I says. "Now, Mr. Smith, I don't want you to think I'm interferin' in what ain't none of my affairs, but if I was you I wouldn't chum in with that gang quite so frequent. They're old birds and rich, likewise they're wise in some respects. To beat them you'd have to be born a consider'ble spell ago and with both eyes wide open. If I was you —"

But, would you b'lieve it, he wouldn't listen. Got peevish and almost mad. Said he was bein' afforded a chance to get acquainted with the world and society, and he considered himself fortunate. I shut up, of course, but I went in and figgered up how much board he owed the hotel. I didn't mean for the house to charge off too much to the world and society, if I could help it.

On the fifth day Anson Hedgegrave stuck up a notice in the lobby of the Old Home House. It said that such and such a pocketbook — describin' it — had been lost. It contained one

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hundred and fifty dollars in banknotes, and the finder could have half that sum for returnin' the wallet and the other half to Mr. Barzilla Wingate at his desk in the office.

"There!" says Hedgegrave, grinnin'. "There's a compromise with integrity that ought to fetch results and immediately settle those bets of Boscoe's and Dillaway's. If there is any honesty aboard the *Rosie* or the *Mallard* that ought to shake it down. Hey, Wingate?"

I thought so. Surely the reward was big enough. And though I wa'n't bettin' too high on the characters of Zach Simmons or Zenas Gill — knowin' 'em well as I done — I did think that safety alone might 'cause 'em to hand over. But when that notice had stayed up for most a whole week, nothin' had come of it.

Hannibal Boscoe and old Dillaway was hardly on speakin' terms by now. You see, there wa'n't any question but that whoever had the pocketbook was a thief. The owner's name wa'n't given on the notice, but my name was. There was no honest reason for not bringin' the lost article to me immediate. And, 'cordin' to Boscoe's arguin', that proved Gill was the guilty party. Zach Simmons bein' all that was pure and smart and whole-souled — not to mention the fact of his skipperin' Boscoe's boat — showed conclusive that *he* wouldn't steal. Dillaway figgered the same way, only exactly opposite. Old man Zenas Gill was a saint — and skipper of the *Mallard* — therefore Simmons was the robber. Ebenezer and Hannibal quarreled somethin' scandalous. Likewise they changed their bet and raised it. Now, each was layin' three hundred that t'other feller's man had found the pocketbook and was keepin' it.

They played poker whenever it rained daytimes, and by and by they took to playin' in the evenin'. Little Smith was pupil, and Hedgegrave, Boscoe, and Dillaway teachers. I watched the Indiana man pretty sharp and, when I dared, I asked questions. Seems he was still behind, though not very much. They was just leadin' him on, that was plain, and he was always hopin' for "revenge." He'd get it, right back of the ears, so I cal'lated.

One night the quartette went up to Boscoe's room after supper and, when I turned in at 11, they was still there. I woke up at 3 and looked out into the hall. The skylight over Boscoe's door was open, the lamplight was still streamin' out, and I heard Smith sayin':

"Well, gentlemen, I — I think I will venture ten dollars."

"Raise you a hundred," says Dillaway.

I went back to bed groanin'. Here was where Indiana got its, I jedged.

Sure and sartin! Early that mornin', when I was in the office afore breakfast, down comes Smith. He looked, so it seemed to me, pretty sick.

"I — I have decided to go, Mr. Wingate," he stammers. "Please have me and my trunk taken to the early train at — at once. I don't think I care for any breakfast."

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I looked at him.

"Go?" I says. "You goin' *now*? I thought you was intendin' to stay for a month more at least. Tired of the world and society already?"

He smiled, pretty feeble. I went back to the desk and got his bill. I'd kept it made out, right up to the minute. I'd been expecting casualties.

"I — I hope the — the charges are not excessive," he says. "I — hope not."

"There they are," I told him.

He took the bill, looked at it, and groaned, sort of to himself. I pitied the poor thing and my conscience got a holt of me.

"Mr. Smith," I says, "we'll knock ten dollars off that, for friendship's sakes."

He thanked me hearty, took some bills out of the purse his Aunt Emilia had give him, and paid up. I fetched a sigh, bein' relieved in my mind. The bus come to the door and he got in.

"Shall I tell Mr. Boscoe and the rest good bye for you?" I asks.

"If you'll be so kind," says he. "Please — er — thank them. They have — er — made it very pleasant for me here. And" — he tried to smile again — "and no doubt I have profited by their acquaintance."

"Yes," I says, "maybe it has been profitable — in a way of speakin'. Now, Mr. Smith," I went on, "you head straight for Indiana and stay there. It's a fine State for — vegetation and such — I hear, and you'll do well, I'm sartin. Good bye and better luck next time!"

After breakfast Hedgegrave come into the office. I was just goin' to tell him of Smith's fadin' so sudden, when somethin' happened that made me forget all about it, for the time.

In walks Zach Simmons, lookin' pretty average sheepish and sort of nervous.

"Mr. Wingate," he says, "can I speak to you a minute?"

"Guess so," says I. "Heave ahead."

He hesitated, looked at Hedgegrave, hemmed and hawed but at last he out with what was on his mind.

"You lost a pocketbook, didn't you?" he asks.

"One's been lost," I answers, settin' up and takin' notice. "Why?"

"What kind of a one was it?"

"It's all told about on that notice in the hall," I says. "You've read it often enough, for I've seen you."

"Is that it?" says he.

Hedgegrave and I pounced on the wallet like hawks droppin' in at a pullet sociable. We undid the strap and laid it open on the counter. Hedgegrave counted the money inside; one hundred and fifty dollars in bills.

Zach watched us, anxious.

"You lost it on the path to the shore, there by the beach-plum bushes, didn't you?" he asks.

"Gosh!" I sings out. And then: "What have you been keepin' it for all this time?"

"I don't know's that's any of your business," begins Simmons, ugly.

I might have said more, but in walks Ebenezer Dillaway.

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"Ha!" says he. "What? You've *found* it?"

"Looks like it," says I.

Hedgegrave didn't answer at all. He was turning over the banknotes.

"*He* found it," chuckles Ebenezer, p'intin' toward Zach. "I thought so. I knew it! That's a good one on Han Boscoe!"

"Look here!" says Simmons. "I b'lieve the one that fetches that pocketbook into this here office gets half of what's in it, don't he?"

"Guess he does," laughs Dillaway. "That's the agreement, wasn't it, Anson?"

Hedgegrave looked at him kind of queer.

"You want me to pay him, do you?" he says to Dillaway.

"I want you to?" repeats Ebenezer. "*I* want you to? Why — why, what do you mean by that? You agreed to pay half of —"

"I know," says Hedgegrave. "Only I wanted it understood by all hands. He gets seventy-five and I keep the rest. Is that agreeable?"

"Agreeable to me, all right," says I. "'Tain't *my* money that's been risked on the fool deal."

"Course it's agreeable," snaps Dillaway. "What are you draggin' us into it for?"

Hedgegrave counts out seventy-five dollars and passes it to Simmons. "There!" says he. "Who says virtue is its own reward? Take your cash, honest man, and trot along."

Zach grabbed the seventy-five and trotted. He seemed to be anxious to go. Dillaway commenced to laugh again.

"Honest man!" he sneers. "Honest enough to hang on until the reward was offered! Wonder what Boscoe'll think of his prayer-meetin' sailin' master now? Guess I win my bet! He — Hello, Cap'n! What do you want?"

'Twas Zenas Gill he was speakin' to. Zach Simmons hadn't no more'n got out of the office than Gill walked into it. He stood there, wringin' his sou'-wester in his hands as if 'twas soakin' wet and shiftin' from one foot to t'other.

"Er — er — Mr. Wingate," says he, lookin' from me to Ebenezer and back again. "I'd kind of like to — to speak with you alone a minute."

"What for?" I asks, laughin'. "*You* ain't found any pocketbook, have you?"

He jumped and stared.

"Why — why, yes I have!" he stutters. "I have found one. That's what I come here for. You lost a wallet with a hundred and fifty dollars in it down on the shore path, they tell me. I —"

"What in thunder?" burst out Dillaway.

Hedgegrave waved him to be still.

"Well," says he, "what of it?"

"And the feller that fetched it here was to get half, wa'n't he?" goes on Zenas.

"Yes."

The old man dove down under the hatches of his coat and comes up with a pocketbook the dead image of the one Zach had just turned over.

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"Is that it?" he asks.

You could have blowed me down with a fan. But Anson Hedgegrave was calm as a church.

"Looks like it," says he. "Is the hundred and fifty inside?"

Ebenezer went up in the air.

"You — you —" he hollers, fairly prancin' fandangos in front of his pet skipper. "What do you mean by this? Who put you up to this game? Don't you know the pocketbook's been found already?"

"*Found?*" roars Zenas. "What —"

And then I'm blessed if Hannibal Boscoe, from Pittsburgh, Pa., didn't "drop into our midst," as the *Weekly Item* would say. Hannibal was grinnin' triumphant.

"Ah, ha!" says he. "The lost is found, hey? And the sainted and spiritual Gill is the angel who's been hangin' onto it. Well, I ain't surprised. Ebenezer, guess you owe me three hundred."

"I do, do I?" screams Dillaway. "Well, I —"

"Steady on!" cuts in Hedgegrave. "Yes, Cap'n Gill, there's a hundred and fifty in your pick-up. Shall I give this man half of it, Boscoe?"

"'Deed you *won't!*" snorts Ebenezer. "Not if I have anything to say."

"You haven't. You said yours about Cap'n Simmons' find. Shall I pay him and keep the rest, Hannibal?"

"What do you ask me for?" snaps Boscoe. "Pay him? Sure! Why not?"

"All right! I'm satisfied if the rest are. There, Saint Zenas, take the results of your honest toil and depart. Ho! Ho! This is *too* rich!"

Down he flops in a chair and hollers and laughs. As for Zenas, he froze onto his seventy-five and run. Dillaway glared at Boscoe and shook his fist.

"It's a fraud!" he sings out. "A put-up job! You're a swindler, sir!"

I thought there would be a sure-enough rumpus, and I was gettin' ready to hop in as peacemaker. But Hedgegrave got ahead of me.

"Hold on, boys!" he says, chokin', and tears runnin' down his fat cheeks, he'd laughed so hard. "Don't roughhouse, please. Let's get down to tacks. Here," he goes on, takin' it from inside his coat, "is a pocketbook, identical with the one we baited the shore path with a while ago. It contained one hundred and fifty dollars, but now contains seventy-five, the remainder havin'-been presented to the person who conveyed it here ten minutes ago — namely, Cap'n Zaccheus Simmons of the catboat *Rosie.*"

"*What?*" whooped Boscoe, his eyes bulgin'.

"Ah, ha!" crowed Dillaway.

"And," pursues Hedgegrave, "here is another pocketbook, also identical, and likewise havin' contained one hundred and fifty produced three minutes ago by Cap'n Zenas Gill of the *Mallard.* Cap'n Zenas also has received his reward. Havin' paid out one hundred and fifty, all accordin' to promise and by general agreement, I now have left one hundred and fifty, which, also accordin' to general and

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mutual agreement, I keep in my possession. Cast your bread on the waters and it doubles up. Ho! Ho!"

Boscoe walked straight acrost the room and p'inted his finger at Ebenezer's nose.

"You call *me* a swindler!" he gurgles, red as a danger lantern on a railroad. "*You* do? *You!* I'll tell you what you are, sir! You're a fake. You went up to that Cahoon store and bought a pocketbook exactly like the one Hedgegrave dropped in the path, and you put a hundred and fifty of your own money in it. And you bribed my man Simmons — an honest man before *you* tackled him — to pretend he found it. He was to get the seventy-five and you was to have the laugh on me and win my three hundred. That's what *you* did! Don't you *dare* deny it, you — you impostor! By George, I —"

"Impostor, am I?" squeals Dillaway. "*I* an impostor! What are you? Do you dare deny that that is exactly what *you* did? Corruptin' my cap'n and —"

"Good land!" I broke in, gettin' my voice at last. "Don't make so much noise, gentlemen, please. The boarders'll all be in here if you do. Can't we settle this thing peaceable? *One* of them pocketbooks must be the right one."

Hedgegrave, who'd had another laughin' fit, sobered up and waved his arms.

"S-sh-sh!" says he. "This is no riot. As Wingate says, blessed are the peacemakers. As to the right pocketbook — well, I don't know. But as to the banknotes, that's different. Boys, you may remember that I went back to the hotel to get the money I put in the original pocketbook. Well, before I returned to our little gatherin' in the summer house, I marked every one of those notes."

"*Marked* 'em?" says Boscoe.

"Um-hm! Marked 'em so I could tell 'em again. I don't know why I did it. Certainly I didn't expect any such circus as this. Ho! Ho! But I did mark 'em. Now here's Cap'n Zach's find — no marks on them. And here's Cap'n Zenas' treasure trove — also no marks. Far be it from me to say whose money this *was*, but it now appears to be mine, unless the rightful owner — or owners — desire to put in a claim."

There wa'n't no claims put in. Ebenezer and Hannibal both glared at each other, but that was all.

"Then," says I, "this is more mixed up than ever. Who — what — why — how'd you mark your bills, Mr. Hedgegrave?"

"With a little circle of ink down on the lower righthand corner of each note," he says.

"Hey?" says I. "A circle?"

"Yes. And inside that circle I put —"

"Not a little *cross?*" I yelled.

He whirled on me. "A little cross is right," he says. "But, for heaven's sake, how —"

I didn't answer. I just got out of my chair, went around to the safe, and unlocked the cash drawer. I was

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so dazed and kind of numb in my head that I cracked my shins two or three times, but it didn't hurt — then. I reached into the cash drawer, took out two tens, two fives, and three two-dollar bills, and brought 'em back to Hedgegrave. I didn't say nothin' — I couldn't — but I laid them bills in his lap.

"By Jove!" says he. "These are some of them. There's my mark on each. But, Wingate, where in the world did they come from?"

I got out my handkerchief and swabbed my forehead.

"Mr. Smith left this mornin'," I says, faintlike.

"Smith?" says Hedgegrave.

"Smith?" repeats Boscoe. "Left? Do you mean to say he's gone for good?"

"I mean that Ezra T. Smith of Peasley, Indiana, left this hotel and this town this mornin' on the depot wagon and early train. He sent his good byes to you gentlemen and paid his board account with them bills."

The three looked at me and then at each other. I looked at them.

"Smith?" says Dillaway.

"*Smith!*" says Boscoe.

"*SMITH!*" says Hedgegrave. "By — the — great — hornspoon! Why — why, fellers, he — he was the one who went and found the pocketbook was *gone!*"

"Smith!" says Dillaway again. "And we thought he was so blessed green!"

"We were teachin' him poker," wails Boscoe. "And — and he won nine hundred on that big jackpot last night, the one where I had three fives, and Dillaway the straight, and you, Hedge, the two pair, aces up. He opened on three tens and got a pair of sixes in the draw, you remember. I thought it was beginner's luck — *Smith!* Well, by George!"

"That jackpot happened on his deal," says Hedgegrave, dreamy.

"And this very mornin'," says I, by way of layin' a final wreath on the coffin, "I knocked ten dollars off his bill 'cause I felt so sorry for him!"

The Hedgegrave man stood up straight. "Gentlemen," says he, "I propose that we, the guileless and trustin' representatives of the farmin' boroughs of Chicago, New York, and Pittsburgh, adjourn to the closet under the stairs where Wingate keeps his no-license refreshment and pour a libation to that flourishin', up-to-date, and cosmopolitan metropolis, Peasley, Indiana."

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*Now that you have reached the end of Joseph C. Lincoln's story, you probably realize that it is not the end at all. Surely there is one aspect of the complications that is not yet explained, to wit: Who was behind the return of the two pocketbooks, resulting in Anson Hedgegrave getting back his $150 investment and the two Cap'ns getting $75 reward each?*

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*It could hardly have been a plot engineered by the two Cap'ns themselves. If that were the case, Cap'ns Zacheus Simmons and Zenas Gill would have wound up, at best, getting back their own money, or, at worst, losing $150 — neither eventuality jibing with their shrewd Yankee horse-trading proclivities. So the extraordinary return of two pocketbooks could only have been a maneuver on the part of Ezra T. Smith, the meek little man from Peasley, Indiana. But why? Why did Smith institute these shenanigans?*

*Was it Smith's way of returning the $150 planted in the original pocketbook? For reasons of honesty? We doubt it. As a joke? Possibly — but if so, Smith's little joke cost him an additional $150 (Hedgegrave got back his $150 and the two Cap'ns got $150 between them). A rather expensive joke for a man of Ezra T. Smith's "strictly business" and "gentle grafting" temperament. Somehow it seems out of character, despite Smith's haul of about $900 in the poker game.*

*So, we are back where we started. We began with the mystery of a pocketbook, and the mystery remains — indeed, it has multiplied, since we end with the mystery of three pocketbooks. But, speaking for ourselves, we are nostalgically happy: Joseph C. Lincoln still has for us the old fascination, the old charm, the old magic. We hope you found them too.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

*Michael Sands's "Wake Up and Live" is one of the thirteen "first stories" which won special awards in EQMM's Ninth Annual Contest — last year's competition. The name "Michael Sands" is a pseudonym which the author has insisted on using to conceal his true identity. Just why the author wishes his identity kept a secret is not clear, but perhaps you will find at least the hint of an explanation in the few facts we have gleaned from the author's agent: "Michael Sands" is a Canadian, in his middle twenties, an ex-Rhodes scholar from Toronto, although born in Brussels of an artist father and a musician mother; at the time of this writing, he was studying at Oxford where he had already won the highest prize for poetry.*

*For a first story, "Wake Up and Live" reveals unusual texture and solidity. The story has a definite "shape" to it — the sense of form that probably stems from the author's deeper interest in poetry. And the theme of the tale is surefire: who is not attracted to the story of a man who keeps having the same dream?*

# 12. WAKE UP AND LIVE

*by MICHAEL SANDS*

THAT NIGHT HE DREAMED HE WAS Hamill. It was his usual dream of gangsters and beautiful women, but this time with a difference. He was at The Pelican Club, in those forbidden rooms upstairs. The scene had a quiet elegance: dark blue velvet drapes shutting out the night, a thick carpet muffling all sound of movement, and the candles discreetly shaded so as to illuminate the tables but not the faces of the players. Everything was just as he remembered. Gathered about the tables, restlessly moving in and out of the circles of light, like fish flickering nervously in an aquarium, were his clients, the citizens of Carverton. They were all in evening dress, the women in swaying gowns with bare shoulders. And they all wore black masks over their eyes. Each of them, drifting into the light, would look up towards him, and below the masks the red lips twisted in guilty, intimate smiles of welcome.

He, Creed Hamill, stood for a moment near the door of his private office, his dark face impassive. He alone wore no mask; and yet not one of the players could have guessed his thoughts as he stepped down and



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passed through their midst. Something was disturbing him tonight, crouching at the edge of his mind. But not until he went down the dark stairs alone did he permit himself a scarcely perceptible frown.

It was a cold night with a fitful moon. He paused, scanning the uncertain sky as his long black car slid to a stop at the curb and the door opened. It was not until he had one foot inside that the nagging shadow took tangible shape.

By then it was too late. Behind him a figure had materialized from a doorway, waiting ominously, unmistakably, at his elbow. And before him, in the opposite corner of the limousine, sat Ella Strang.

He shrugged, as a French nobleman might have shrugged stepping into the tumbrel, and took his place beside her. A faintly cynical smile touched his lips as he said lightly, "Long time no see, baby."

The gunman climbed in beside him, his left hand held stiffly inside his coat, and the car moved off. Creed Hamill wondered idly whether it was his own chauffeur driving. He grinned wryly: he had been away too long.

"I wasn't expecting you tonight," he remarked.

He spoke in a casual, conversational tone, but his voice made no sound. His scalp prickled at the discovery, and for a moment his cool assurance wavered. Ella, however, stirred in the darkness. Her own voice, low and thrilling as always, held even now the hint of a magical promise.

"You shouldn't have come back, Creed."

"This is my town," he said. "It's too big for you and Matt. It needs me."

Again he only mouthed the words. But Ella answered, "This has nothing to do with Matt."

Her voice was still cool and clear, but now it had an edge of irony. She went on: "You're right. This is too big for Matt. This is something between you and me."

He murmured, "Something new?"

"You're a great bluffer, Creed. I'll hand it to you. And with ninety-nine people the bluff works. But not with me. Never with me."

He smiled quizzically. "Never?"

She ignored him. "And I'll hand you something else. You've never underestimated an enemy. The tax rap was a slip: it could have happened to anybody." Her dark eyes gleamed. "And ninety-nine times you know who your enemies are. But not the time that counts, Creed. Not the last time."

He met irony with irony. "And you can run it alone?"

"I can run it alone."

The car had turned off the highway west of town and was bumping down a dirt road without its headlights. The Bluffs, thought Hamill: where the river swung in against the cliffs and ran swift and strong down to the rapids; where on summer evenings the high-school kids would park in the moonlight. But not tonight; not with the first snow of the season blow-

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ing delicately against the windows. Not at 3 o'clock.

He must move now. But even as the thought formed in his mind the car stopped and the left-handed gunman leaned significantly against him. He shrugged and turned back to Ella. The moonlight gleamed briefly on her cheek, leaving her eyes in shadow.

"Kiss me goodbye," he said huskily.

She said without expression: "I did that five years ago, Creed."

Then he was out on the iron-hard ground, the wind whipping at his black fedora and a loose end of his silk scarf. Clouds raced low across the moon, and the light snow brushed across his lips, as if she had kissed him after all. At the car window a face loomed for a moment, but it was no longer Ella's face; and the car itself had expanded to an impossible length, black, gleaming evilly. The gunman, who had spoken no word, was forcing him towards the cliff-edge.

Hamill's control vanished. Abruptly, he was no longer Hamill, but an innocent man, a mute, terrified man named Henderson, running frantically along the tilting cliff yet never moving, uttering inaudible cries, still able in the last moment to see the sneer on the face of the left-handed man as he raised his gun . . .

Not bad, thought William Cleveland Henderson as he dressed the next morning; not bad at all. Obviously, the ending of the dream must be changed. A gun in his own pocket, maybe — though in his experience dream guns were seldom reliable, always jamming or dissolving into something else at times of crisis. Well, then, his own men following in a car, arriving in the nick of time with guns blazing; or Ella relenting at the last moment. No, not that! The vision of a beaten Ella, a trembling Ella confronted by Hamill suave and victorious, appealed to his sense of drama and quickened his pulse. The logic of the dream must be preserved, and yet somehow he must be left master of the situation, preferably by his own single-handed action.

And some details needed attention. The masked people in the gaming rooms; his inability to make himself heard; the absence of a bodyguard — surely Hamill would not have left The Pelican Club alone?

Henderson made a hobby of his dreams. He did not doubt that he would be able to dream this one again, or to mould it nearer his heart's desire. He was quite accustomed to having the same dream four or five times. And it was only yesterday that he had come down to breakfast jubilant at his success in remodeling a familiar nightmare into a thrilling adventure, with himself as the hero.

In fact, yesterday morning had been very significant indeed. His eyes narrowed as he shaved. Looking back critically, he found that he could trace the genesis of his dream, point for point, in the events at his own breakfast table, twenty-four hours ago.

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Charlotte, his wife, had listened patiently to his account of the transformed nightmare, with her usual expression of bland maternal benevolence. Dreams, she acknowledged, could be pleasant, or terrifying; but either way they remained a little queer. Healthy people forgot them when they woke. To pursue them as her husband did seemed to her childish, if not somehow indecent.

She had waited until his first enthusiasm spent itself. And then, rustling the paper, she had said mildly, "I see Creed Hamill's back in town."

No other subject could have distracted him. "Hamill?" he repeated eagerly, and the faraway gleam rekindled in his eyes. Carrying his coffee round the table, he stood looking over her shoulder at the front-page story under the headline, *CZAR COMES BACK TO CARVERTON.*

It was a neatly contrived story. Mr. Creed Hamill, owner of The Pelican Club, Carverton's Swankiest Nite Spot, had spent five years in Federal custody in connection with a tax irregularity, and was now returning to take up business again in his home town. That was the gist of it; and by means of cautious hints and ambiguities the *Chronicle* had succeeded in sketching the whole story without anywhere giving Hamill occasion to take offense. All Carverton would remember was that at the time of the tax investigations there had been other charges, widespread but never proved, that The Pelican Club was the scene of certain illegal activities. And reading between the lines of the newspaper story, all Carverton would appreciate, as Henderson did, the suggestion that organized gambling was by no means the limit of Hamill's enterprises.

Henderson grinned. A smooth customer: income tax was the only thing they could get him on. And now that he was back, it might be better to forget even that. The *Chronicle* was not without a fine crusading spirit, but it knew on which side its bread was buttered. The Czar is back: long live the Czar. Henderson grinned again. Czar was a good word. It was not entirely displeasing to consider that Carverton should be big enough to possess a czar of its own. Even in the careful allegations of the *Chronicle* story you might have detected a faint overtone of civic pride.

"That racketeer," said Henderson fondly.

"That awful man," agreed Charlotte, without force.

There were pictures too. One of Hamill, suave and darkly good-looking under a black fedora. You would have taken him for one of Carverton's prominent businessmen—and, thought Henderson genially, you wouldn't have been far wrong. And a very good likeness of Ella Strang — whom the *Chronicle* characterized with some delicacy as Mr. Hamill's "deputy," explaining that in his absence it was she who had taken over the management of The Pelican Club, proving herself capable as well as charming.

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Studying her face covertly, Henderson lapsed into furtive meditation upon the duties of a "deputy." Ella wasn't what you thought of as a gangster's moll. Like Hamill, she had class. She reminded you of girls on the North Side, rich men's daughters with too much money and too much time. "A capable businesswoman," the paper called her. Well, yes. There were as many types of career woman as there were types of career. Ella knew where she wanted to go, and she knew how to get there. And if neither her ends nor her means were those that society approved of, at least society could not deny that she had her own standards and stuck to them.

And Matthew Powers, Mr. Hamill's lawyer at that trial five years ago. Fat Matt Powers had come a long way in five years. The golden cord between his law office and The Pelican Club had grown thicker, shorter, and weightier. There had been no further police raids on Carverton's Swankiest Nite Spot, and Matt Powers was fatter than ever. Powers and Ella, thought Henderson absently; how far had Fat Matt stepped into Hamill's shoes? Noting Powers's heavy jowls and little shrewd eyes, Henderson shook his head.

"That awful man," Charlotte repeated. "He's no better than a criminal. He's spent five years in jail, and now they let him come back and start all over again."

"*They* do," said Henderson slowly. "But will he be able to? I'll bet Matt Powers isn't so glad to see him back. He's had things his own way too long."

Charlotte glanced up, irritated by the obscure sympathy in his tone. "I don't know what this town's coming to," she declared. "Why don't the police do something? Why doesn't the Mayor put these people in jail where they belong?"

Her husband laughed and moved back to his chair. "The police can't, and the Mayor wouldn't dare," he said briefly. "Look, Char. In a town this size, a growing industrial city, you can't help having a certain amount of gambling and corruption. It's a sign of vigor; it proves we're alive and growing. And if some racketeering is unavoidable, I'd sooner see it run by Hamill than a cheap crook like Powers.

"You can do business with Hamill, within limits. He won't touch violence or petty crime. He does things on a big scale and he does them quietly — you might almost say respectably. In his own way, he's just as concerned as your Mayor is about keeping Carverton a quiet place. It's to his advantage. Personally, I'm glad to see Hamill back."

He spoke as the wise, expansive man of the world. The familiar pose annoyed Charlotte, but the moral twilight which he described with such assurance left her perplexed and unsure of her ground. Compressing her lips, she shifted her direction.

"And what about that woman?" she demanded. "Why, she's nothing more than a common — a common

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slut! She ought to be whipped."

Something like genuine hatred flashed in her eyes, normally so placid and vague, and her broad, plump face set in hard, vengeful lines. Henderson modified his stand.

"Of course, I don't mean I like the situation any better than you do, Char. If this town were run the way it should be, there'd be no room for Hamill, let alone people like Powers and — and the woman. But we bring them on ourselves. If we didn't have a weakness for gambling and that kind of thing, they couldn't take advantage of us."

With this pious conclusion Charlotte was less reluctant to concur. She said, knowing it was irrelevant, "You know I never gamble."

"And you know I don't either, except in the way of business," Henderson laughed. He looked at his watch, and rose. "Speaking of which, it's about time I got back to the old rat race."

"That's no way to speak of a respectable firm," said Charlotte automatically.

He gave a dutiful chuckle in reply. The old joke acted as an All Clear signal. As he walked past her towards the hall, she held the paper up at arm's length.

"You know, Billy, he looks like you, in a way."

"Who, Hamill?" Henderson disliked being called Billy, but he could not ignore the further overture. "Say, I guess he does, at that. Well, I'd better make sure Matt Powers' boys don't see me." He laughed again, and patted her shoulder in farewell.

And yet, yesterday, the joke about the rat race had seemed for some reason to have more truth in it than usual. Answering letters and making phone calls throughout the long morning in the offices of Barnaby & Henderson, sitting through a long luncheon with an irritable, sarcastic Stephen Barnaby, and making the usual round of visits and inspections with the usual herd of stubborn, indecisive clients throughout the endless afternoon, Henderson felt, as he had not felt for many years, that he was hurrying on a moving floor in a cage, unceasingly, without progress, without meaning, without escape. As time went by, the treadmill might acquire a plush carpet, the cage command a better view; but the action never changed.

And that night he had dreamed he was Hamill.

It was all there, marveled Henderson, knotting his tie. Spoken, implied, or scarcely thought of, all the materials of his dream lay scattered in that breakfast of yesterday. How miraculously, how like a movie director the dreaming mind had forged them together, into a coherent, fast-moving story!

And yet there had been something new, after all. The war between Hamill and Ella, the revelation that she, not Powers, was working against him and was willing to sacrifice whatever intimacy there had been between

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them to gain her own ends — that had been nowhere suggested in the news report or his own meditations. It was an addition, an invention of his fancy; and even as he applauded its dramatic fitness, he puzzled over its origin. It was essential, it gave the dream story an admirable twist, and it would make all the more satisfying the turning of the tables which he meant to impose on the plot. But where had it come from?

He did not know. He sensed obscurely that the answer lay just beyond his reach, and that it had something to do with the queer face at the car window in the place of execution. But the vital link escaped him.

Nevertheless, he decided against telling Char about the dream, persuading himself that there would be no point in uncovering again the tension that Hamill had provoked between them yesterday.

As it happened, Char gave him no opportunity. She was wholly preoccupied with her arrangements for the evening — for Mr. Barnaby was coming to dinner, a circumstance which had slipped Henderson's mind; and her anxieties and last-minute plans for a successful social occasion entirely dominated breakfast.

Henderson cracked his boiled egg in moody silence. It was incomprehensible, he told himself, how Charlotte could admire a crotchety, hypocritical old tyrant like Stephen Barnaby. That he himself had once shared her feelings had very little to do with it. Barnaby was out of date. His days of vision and adventure were past. And because he tolerated no departure from his antique style of doing business, the firm of Barnaby & Henderson was treading water while prosperity flooded Carverton.

Henderson sneered. Tonight at dinner Barnaby would bask in Charlotte's worshipful gaze and pronounce with an air of vast wisdom statements which had been new 50 years before. Two-faced old tabby-cat. At the office, where there was no reason to sheathe his claws, he had driven that pretty Miss Wentworth into a state of nervous exhaustion with his petty complaining. But to Char, who spent days deciding on a menu to please his finicky palate, or to any fat foolish woman who had 30 or 40 thousand to spend on a house, he was as genial as could be. And Char, poor thing, would lap it up. She would hang on every syllable, and repeat each oracle to her husband for weeks to come.

The dinner, ten long hours later, proved to be everything that Charlotte had hoped — and everything Henderson had feared. Mr. Barnaby arrived ten minutes early, radiating false *bonhomie*. Mellowed by food and wine, he permitted himself his usual idiotic joke about the Apple-Charlotte and, over coffee, indulged in his usual reminiscences of "Business in the Old Days."

When the conversation veered toward the return of Hamill, Barnaby sat back and expanded. He had every confidence, he said, that the authori-

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ties were not only aware of the situation but were merely biding their time to make a final raid on The Pelican Club and close it down once and for all. This time Hamill would be put away for good, and that shyster Powers would have the next cell. As for that woman — well, she would be given a chance to toughen those white hands of hers with some years of honest labor.

He had little patience with Henderson's theory of a split between Hamill and Powers. "It may be, Bill," he nodded indulgently. "It may be. But I can't see that it makes much difference. If they want to play into the hands of the law that much quicker, well, let 'em, I say."

Charlotte glanced at her husband with a gleam of triumph, then turned back to ask if Mr. Barnaby had ever been to The Pelican Club.

"Been there?" Pride wrestled with regret in his thin face. "Why, yes, I've been there. I sold Hamill that property, fifteen years back or more. He was new in town, of course. Quiet, plenty of ready money, honest as a deacon to look at. Of course, if I'd had any idea . . . I still blame myself, in a way. As I see it, a real estate man has a duty to the community. And sometimes I think I failed in that duty."

Henderson could hardly contain himself. It had been ten years, not fifteen, since Hamill bought the premises of The Pelican Club. And he himself, not Barnaby, had shown the well-dressed, soft-spoken stranger around the spacious, echoing rooms of the old Garfield place, wondering even then to what use they would be put. He, Henderson, had closed the deal. And from that day he had followed with secret pleasure the shadowy career of Creed Hamill, cherishing the memory that, in a manner of speaking, he had helped the Czar get a start.

Altogether it was not surprising that he should have the dream again that night, after he had driven a benign, patronizing Barnaby to his home on the North Side, and after Charlotte had conducted her post-mortem of the evening while he prepared for bed. It was satisfying to find the gaming rooms of The Pelican Club much as he remembered them, and his patrons no longer masked, though still inclined to waver out of focus. And it was not greatly to be wondered at that among the faces now revealed, looming in irresistible fascination over the roulette wheel, he should be able to discern the guilty countenance of Stephen Barnaby, wet-lipped, with greed and the consciousness of sin shining in his eyes. And among the other players there were several more of Carverton's prominent citizens, moral householders, and pillars of the church.

Creed Hamill smiled invisibly. He knew these people, knew and despised the reality behind the respectable façades. Themselves weak and treacherous, they trusted him; they depended on him to supervise their folly and

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protect them from its consequences. He, their master, accepted and fulfilled that trust with an amused contempt: for he needed no one and trusted no one.

Then, imperceptibly, he frowned. Beneath his attitude of habitual distrust there was tonight something specific, a disturbing shadow on the edge of consciousness which he knew he must in time recognize and examine. But it could wait. It had nothing to do with these leering, phantom hypocrites who swayed towards him as he passed. It had nothing to do with the obsequious little man who helped him into his coat at the door. Only while going down the dark stair did he permit himself to raise the question. Was there a detail he had overlooked?

His bodyguard. But by the time he remembered it was too late. The long car had stopped at the moonlit curb and the gunman had moved out of the shadows. Hamill shrugged, and took his place in the back seat. The faint cynical smile returned to his lips as he said lightly, "Long time no see, baby."

And tonight, as from a vast distance, he could hear his own voice. He relaxed in the darkness, ignoring the gunman, playing out his role in the drama with easy assurance. Later there would be an occasion for swift, decisive action; but for the moment there was no need to do more than savor the magic of Ella's voice and the enchantment of her perfume. Smooth irony rose without effort to his lips, and once or twice he thought he could detect some uncertainty in Ella's glacial self-possession.

"Isn't this where we turn off?" he remarked presently.

As if in answer, the chauffeur swung the wheel in front of his glass partition, and the car bumped down toward the river. Genuine alarm flashed briefly in Ella's eyes.

She said, "You're a great bluffer, Creed. I'll hand it to you. And with ninety-nine people . . . "

"Tell me about the hundredth," he interposed. "Tell me about you, Ella."

The gunman shifted uneasily, and Hamill glanced at him, grinning. "Take it easy, Lefty," he said. "I never carry a gun." He turned back to the girl. "You were saying?"

She said vaguely, as if she had memorized the words, "Ninety-nine times you know who your enemies are. But not the last time, Creed. Not the time that counts."

Hamill laughed. He leaned toward her, and there was no suggestion of huskiness in his steady, mocking voice. "Kiss me goodbye, Ella."

She would have an answer to that, too. But before she could speak or turn away he had covered her lips with his own, and for a moment there were only the two of them in the whole world.

Then he was alone under the doubtful sky, the left-handed man following him at what seemed to be a great distance, and a white face watching from the car window. He waited con-

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fidently for inspiration. His mind was taut and clear, ready at any instant to profit from his murderer's least mistake.

But nothing happened. Lefty, moving cautiously forward, made no mistakes. No second car roared into view with a rattle of gunfire. No weapon leaped magically into his own hand as he stepped slowly backward to the cliff edge.

He strained his will against Lefty's implacable advance. Beneath his feet the hard ground wavered as if seen through flawed glass, and the bluffs tilted on the edge of nightmare. The face at the car window was unrecognizable, a face of menace, watching his retreat with triumph and hatred. There was one escape left. Gathering his strength in a last convulsive effort, he willed himself to wake. The snow-bound landscape shimmered. The moon spun crazily through the clouds, the car dwindled to a shining beetle, the world fell away beneath him. Through the dissolving texture of his dream the comic bewilderment on the face of his executioner remained with him, his final consolation . . . as he woke.

In the weeks that followed he could not achieve any more satisfactory conclusion. The details of the dream remained under his control, to alter and refine as he desired. The kiss, once obtained, could be prolonged; the conversation could be varied and polished to perfection. Knowing each time what was going to happen, he had the initiative, and was able to awe the simple gunman and throw Ella herself into confusion. But the broad lines of the story and its ending resisted his will. It was never possible to make sure of his bodyguard, or to prepare in some other way for the meeting on the Bluffs. And in the final scene he was never able to do better than delay, with a cool assurance that passed for courage, the moment when he should slide into wakefulness and another world.

And so he began, unconsciously at first, to extend the dream into his waking life. He wore his dark suits and his darkest hat. His speech became deliberate, low but carrying, and a subtle aloofness crept into his manner. He began signing himself W. Cleveland Henderson, then just Cleveland Henderson, and he bought handkerchiefs monogrammed C. H. When Charlotte decided it was time he had a new overcoat, he chose a black one, conservatively tailored from expensive material, and a white silk evening scarf to go with it. He grew a neat, dark mustache which gave his face a debonair look and a new distinction.

This transformation seemed to pass unnoticed by Charlotte. But one morning as he went into the senior partner's office Miss Wentworth, Barnaby's pretty blonde secretary, looked up at him with surprise.

"Why, Mr. Henderson," she exclaimed. "I never noticed it before, but you know you look exactly like Creed Hamill! It's uncanny."

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"You don't say." Henderson pointed an imaginary gun at her. "Keep it under your hat, baby. I don't like squealers."

With her delighted giggle still echoing in his ears he entered the inner sanctum. Barnaby, as usual, pretended to be too engrossed in something on his desk to notice his presence, but when Henderson took a chair without waiting to be asked, he looked up, frowning.

"Oh, Bill," he said. "There were some details I wanted to clear up."

It was his customary formula, introducing a host of petty complaints and criticisms of how Henderson ought to be doing his work. This morning Henderson listened impassively, like a rock upon which thin rain was falling. It had suddenly become clear to him that these daily interviews, purporting to have the interests of the firm as their object, were really designed to undermine any feeling of security he might have developed. Barnaby was afraid of losing his grip; and since he could no longer set Henderson an example, he bolstered his own ego by belittling and criticizing every action of his junior partner. Henderson smiled. How remarkable it seemed that he should ever have been deceived by this. How fantastic that he should ever have left Barnaby's office troubled and uncertain of his own ability!

"And about Mrs. Macdonald," Barnaby was saying. "I don't doubt you know what you're about, Bill, but it's been ten days since she first approached us, and we're not any nearer to a definite settlement. With this in view, I've taken the liberty of asking her to drop in this afternoon and discuss —"

"That won't be necessary," Henderson said. "I closed the deal yesterday."

"You what? Oh, indeed. You closed the deal." Barnaby was momentarily at a loss. Then his eye brightened. "And might I ask what —"

"Twenty-nine grand," said Henderson briefly. "Fifteen hundred more than you asked. She can afford it." He rose. "Was there anything else?"

"No." Barnaby was clearly shaken. "No, nothing else, Bill."

Henderson nodded in farewell, his dark face impassive. Outside, Miss Wentworth's heart-shaped face tilted up towards him.

"Gosh," she said. "That was quick."

He paused beside her desk. "Yeah. He'll be out in a few minutes, biting and scratching. Don't get too close to him."

Poor kid, he thought, as her eyes danced. It couldn't be much of a life for a girl, enduring that old fool day after day. Too dried-up and too scared to do anything about women himself, but he liked having a pretty one nearby — someone to be worn down each day by that constant drizzle of petty, acid criticism, without being able to talk back. And she would be too tired in the evening for more than an occasional movie, when by rights she should be dancing and dining at places like The Pelican Club, drink-

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ing champagne, meeting handsome, suave men . . .

A decision crystallized in his mind. Leaning down, he said gently, "I wanted to ask you something. Would you consider having dinner with an old married man? — No ulterior motives. And no offense if you say no."

She had stopped smiling. Now she gave him a level look and said in a quiet voice: "Yes, I'd like that very much."

Henderson was swept by exultation: not simply because she had accepted, but because it had gone exactly as he intended. It was just as he would have dreamed it, except that it was real. He was the captain of his soul. When the door marked *Private* opened, he grimaced at the girl and straightened to face Barnaby. But Barnaby caught sight of him, hesitated, and then went back in as if he had forgotten something.

"Tonight, then," Henderson said, smiling. "Seven thirty."

And with her answering smile warming his memory he went back to his own office to call Char and to make reservations at The Pelican Club.

From the front page of the *Chronicle*, which lay folded on his desk, his own face stared up at him. Curiously, he picked it up, realizing as he did so that the photograph was of course not his, but Hamill's. Mr. Creed Hamill, the caption stated, had left Carverton on a business trip to the coast and would be absent for several days.

Henderson felt a brief rush of concern. A business trip? What if the business was Ella's, and the trip ended on the high Bluffs above the river? That would be a trip to the coast, with a vengeance. In a week's time his body might be found downriver among the mill towns, unrecognizable — or perhaps never found at all.

Whereas, if he had had the warning that Henderson alone could have given him . . .

Cleveland Henderson shook his head with a slow smile. It was astonishing how firm a hold that dream had taken in him. For a moment he had actually been toying with the idea of calling The Pelican Club and asking for Hamill's private line instead of the reservations desk. Hello, Mr. Hamill? No, you don't know me: my name is Henderson, Cleveland Henderson. . . . No, there isn't anything you can do for me. I want to do something for *you*. I want to warn you against Ella Strang. One of these nights she's going to kill you. . . . What evidence do I have? Well, it's this dream. I've had it five times now, and each time . . .

Looking down at the face so much like his own, Henderson continued to smile. His feeling toward Hamill, he discovered, was one of affection tinged with nostalgia — the feeling you might have for a Teddy Bear once loved and now discarded, or a childish ambition long ago abandoned. Hamill had been his hero, as the fireman or the engineer had been the heroes of other boys. The only dif-

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ference was that his own boyhood had lasted longer.

Well, it was over now. He now saw his dream, summing up all his hidden yearnings, as the last gasp of childish fantasy. It had been natural enough as a reaction to his dull, unadventurous daily life. But once you recognized that, there was little point in going on dreaming. The dream had served its purpose. Across the dream face of Ella, so much more beautiful and magical than it could possibly be in real life, there now drifted the image of Jean Wentworth, Barnaby's pretty secretary.

Chuckling ruefully at his dead self, Henderson began to dial. Fragments of verse floated up from limbo. Wake up and live, he thought. Up, lad; when the journey's over, there'll be time enough for sleep.

"Hello," he said. "I want to make a reservation."

The dream, however, would not be denied. He found himself walking on an empty street in the uncertain moonlight, wearing as usual his black overcoat and white silk scarf. A number of dim recollections persuaded him that the preceding scene at The Pelican Club had gone off satisfactorily: but everything was far less distinct than before, and he could not accurately remember what had happened. Something, he knew obscurely, was missing, and after a moment's concentration he realized what it was, and turned back to look for it. Something about a car. But things were proceeding very smoothly. He had taken only a few steps when the car itself drew up beside the curb, and someone who had been following him appeared to motion him inside.

That solved one problem, he thought irrelevantly — at least, he would not have to drive home. For some reason the knowledge comforted him, and as he climbed in he smiled cheerfully at Ella, sitting frozen and withdrawn in the far corner.

"Long time no see, baby."

He felt a sharp pressure over his heart. Turning, he found that the left-handed man was jabbing the gun into him warningly. He chuckled.

"Take it easy, Lefty. You know I never carry a rod."

He settled himself comfortably. This was familiar ground. Both Lefty and the girl were obviously disconcerted by his air of assurance. But there was something else about Ella's manner that puzzled him. The hatred had always been there, but with an underlying warmth, an unwilling memory of what they had been to each other. Tonight, strangely, that conflict no longer existed. She was cold as ice.

He said casually, experimentally, "Isn't this where we turn off?"

Ella's eyes flashed. Her voice in the darkness was cynical and metallic. "You're a great bluffer, Creed. I'll hand you that. And with ninety-nine people you might get away with it. But not with me. Never with me."

The car had turned off the highway. Henderson smiled lazily.

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"And can you and Matt really run it alone?" he asked, as if thinking aloud.

"I can run it alone." Her voice was flat and cold. "This has nothing to do with Matt. You should know that. This is between you and me, Creed." She leaned forward scornfully. "Never underestimate an enemy, do you? And ninety-nine times you knew who your enemies were. But not this time. Not the last time."

The familiar, mechanical abuse bored him. Her face, close to his in the fitful moonlight, reminded him that the time for pleasure was growing short. Besides, outlines were growing dim again. The dream might dissolve entirely before he had begun to enjoy it.

He said coolly, "Kiss me goodbye, Ella."

The car lurched as he leaned forward, and he was thrown against her. She shrank away from him, and a gleam appeared suddenly in her hand.

"Keep your drunken paws off me," she whispered, her lips curling back from her teeth. "I don't have to take that from anybody. Not even you."

With the other gun jabbing at his heart, Henderson sat back.

"A trip to the coast," she said bitterly. "Maybe somebody else would laugh at that. Maybe somebody else could sit there and take it easy when you waltz in with some cheap blonde, in front of half the town. But not me, Creed."

Henderson began to laugh. The detached observer in his mind, the eye that watches and reflects upon even the happenings of a dream, suddenly perceived what had happened. And what had happened was so perversely logical and so irresistibly absurd that he could no longer keep up his part in the farce, but chuckled uncontrollably.

Ella was visibly taken aback, but she rallied. "Maybe it's all a terrible mistake," she said, with fine sarcasm. "Maybe it was your kid sister, or your little cousin from the country. Maybe you aren't Creed Hamill at all. Maybe I'm dreaming."

"Stop," Henderson spluttered. "You're killing me."

And as that final ambiguity struck him he gave way to another fit of laughter. He was still laughing when the car stopped and he was forced out into the dark wind.

"So long, honey," he called. "I guess this is the last time."

Her face appeared, white and set, at the car window. Henderson shook his head in dazed appreciation. It was like the last few minutes of a movie, tying in each loose end, making every motive clear. He recalled distinctly now the stir of excitement that had been caused at The Pelican Club by his entrance with Jean Wentworth. He heard Jean's laughter and his own voice calling firmly for more champagne. After that the pictures faded into a blur: but that much had evidently been woven into his dream, to explain Ella's icy hostility and to supply the

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missing motive for his execution.

"Back." Like a frog's croak, the voice of the left-handed man came down the wind.

Henderson slithered good-humoredly nearer the edge. The ground was frozen hard, with patches of ice, and the wind whipped at his silk scarf. He turned to face Lefty and saw that the woman had got out of the car and was walking very slowly towards him. He narrowed his eyes. In the uncertain light she seemed for a moment broader and heavier, with a plump, vengeful face.

"Okay, Hamill," Lefty said. "This is it."

Henderson ignored him, fascinated by the woman's painful advance. He would have to explain things to Char, he thought uneasily. And he would have to explain to Jean, too, that he did not wish her to draw any extravagant conclusions from what had occurred. Poor kid. He saw her eyes fixed upon him, hurt and filled with sadness. It would not be easy, but it must be done.

But not now. Lefty had raised his gun. Henderson nodded in ironic salute, and addressed himself to the effort of waking. The dream obstinately resisted him. He clenched his fists. Sweat formed on his forehead, prickled his scalp. The woman moved implacably closer.

"Char!" he shouted desperately. "Char!"

But the wind tore his words away, roared in his ears. His lungs ached with his breathing. Lefty's finger was tightening. The moon dwindled to a pin-point, then expanded slowly to fill the sky, swallowing him in a cold blaze of light. He felt the cliff buckle beneath him, and his executioners suddenly grew to a vast insubstantial height as he fell down, down through the dissolving world of his dream.

After a long moment the left-handed man lowered his gun, and turned to the girl.

"But I didn't shoot," he said, pleadingly. "I didn't shoot!"

The girl shook her head, her face in that unreal light beginning to reflect the expression of incredulous bewilderment on the face of the man who lay, with his eyes open, dead at their feet.

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*Another tale of Socrates, philosopher detective, and what might be called the Socratic manhunting method . . . You will be interested to know that the other people in the story actually existed in ancient Athens: the two artists are drawn from real life, and their rivalry, as well as their characters and costuming, derive from fact; the architect was once a living person too, although many aspects of his personality are still the object of historical conjecture. The author's reconstruction of the past — so difficult an art when done well — is splendid both in tone and thought.*

## 3. SOCRATES SOLVES ANOTHER MURDER

*by BRÈNI JAMES*

SOCRATES PAUSED AT THE FOOT OF the Acropolis and looked up at the marble façade of the outer gates. He stood with the grace of a soldier, though his military career was some ten years behind him and a certain roundness at his waistline belied his graceful carriage.

The setting sun dipped beneath the overcast that had darkened the afternoon sky, and flashed its final splendor across Athens like a retreating hoplite tossing a flambeau over his shoulder. The fire-red beams fell on the columns and the great bronze doors of the Propylaea, the outer gates, that rose above the western brink of the hill.

"It is truly the jewel in the forehead of Athens," said the philosopher, his eyes still on the marble gateway. Despite the pug nose and protruding eyes, his face showed a great and serene beauty. He turned and smiled at his companion of the moment, Mnesicles, who was the architect of the great outer gates.

Mnesicles, a man in his late forties, blushed like a youth at this compliment from the man who, though almost ten years younger than himself, was acclaimed by many as the greatest thinker of their time.

At length he ventured, "Socrates, if the Propylaea is indeed a jewel, it is complete only in its setting."

"I know," Socrates said quietly. The great dream of the architect had been cut short by the new government. Four hundred talents ($2,400,000) had already gone into the construction of the great gates, but war and the whim of the city had cut off appropriations. The south wing of the edifice had scarcely been begun, and now it hung like an undeveloped limb on an otherwise perfect body.

"Perhaps when Athenians tire of seeing so splendid a work left in such imbalance, they will find money enough for you to finish it, Mnesicles."

"I've always thought they would," shrugged the architect. "The money



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was withdrawn while we were still working on the north wing. I could have modified my plans, but I kept hoping that at the last minute, perhaps . . ."

His voice trailed off. Socrates looked at him closely. Mnesicles was a pale, unobtrusive little man; today he looked as though a great sickness had come upon him. Even his bald head had a certain unhealthy pallor about it, and his fine eyes were glazed.

"After we get a permanent peace," Socrates began helpfully, but the architect cut him off:

"No, no," he said dismally. "There is money enough now, but there are other plans for it." He looked at his friend. "Have you noticed the two murals being painted in the west portico?" he asked.

Socrates: I've not seen them yet, but I understand they are the works of Parrhasius and Zeuxis.

Mnesicles: And not just in the west portico, my dear Socrates. They have commissions for every bare wall in the place.

Socrates: I should think they would first let you build them more walls. Well, I'm glad I found you in the market; a few peaceful moments in the Acropolis together will cheer you.

The philosopher took the other's arm, and led Mnesicles up the winding slope, past the random votive offerings and pieces of statuary that lined the path. One of the architect's slaves, a young boy of perhaps sixteen, fell in silently behind them as they walked up to the Propylaea.

The huge bronze doors in the center of the gateway were closed this late in the day, but one of the smaller ones on their right was still open. They walked through it and found their way to the large west portico of the structure. Their destination was to have been a sanctuary beyond, in the Acropolis, but they were halted by a strange sight: Next to the south wall, beneath a flamboyant mural, lay the naked body of a youth not much older than the slave who attended them.

The two men bent over the lifeless form, Socrates hitching his untidy mantle out of the way of a pool of blood that had seeped from the underside of the naked youth's head.

"Whom do you think it is?" asked Mnesicles in a whisper.

Socrates passed his hands over the heavy muscles of the back and turned one of the limp hands over, touching the callouses there with a gentle finger. "A slave, wouldn't you say? One that carried heavy loads. Perhaps a stonemason's or statuary's helper."

The architect remained silent. Socrates looked troubled for a moment, eyeing the peculiar position of the graceful body. It was spread out, face down, limbs apart, as though the boy had been beaten and had been thrashing about on the ground before his death. But there were no marks on the body, save for what was obviously a fatal blow on the head.

One glance at the mural before which the body lay, however, explained the discrepancy. "Compare

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them," said Socrates, indicating the corpse and the central figure of the painting. They were exactly alike, save for the fact that the boy's face showed nothing but death, and the face of the figure in the mural showed an ecstasy of pain. They could almost hear screams of epithet and indignant agony from the lifelike mouth of the painted creature.

Mnesicles sucked in his breath as the horror of the sight brought a flush to his sallow cheeks.

"Which of the two painters would you say did this scene?" Socrates asked.

"Parrhasius." The architect spat out the word as though it had blood on it.

Socrates: I have heard that Parrhasius will go to great lengths to get realism in his paintings. Do you think that is true?

Mnesicles: He is said to . . . to torture slaves to get the look of pain he wishes to copy, Socrates.

Socrates: Perhaps you had better send your attendant to fetch Parrhasius. And Zeuxis, too. But no word of this death to either of them.

The philosopher had risen from the body and turned to look at the mural on the wall across the portico — the one that, to judge from its style, was being done by Zeuxis. It was a portrait of the young Endymion, a beautiful youth reclining in an attitude of undisturbed sleep.

At Socrates's suggestion the architect and he waited for the painters outside the bronze gates, and at length they spied the pair walking up the slope followed by Mnesicles's servant.

Zeuxis was more readily discernible in the twilight, not only by reason of his six-foot-four stature, but because he wore a mantle of remarkable fashion: it was checkered red and green. Once along the path he paused to speak to his companion, turning his back to the men above, and they could easily distinguish in the dusk the great gold-embroidered letters on the back of the mantle which spelled out: *ZEUXIS*. He swaggered, gesturing freely, apparently deep in a one-sided conversation.

His listener and fellow artist, Parrhasius, was robed in purple; and as the pair reached the marble stairs of the Propylaea, the fading sun caught the golden crown that Parrhasius wore atop his dark curls, and by which, as everyone knew, he proclaimed himself, "The Prince of Painters."

Physically Parrhasius was somewhat less prepossessing than his competitor. He was nearly as tall, but a thickness of indolent fat encased what might otherwise have been a well-proportioned figure. His features were gross, his beard a tight-curled fur that clung to his round face like a small frightened animal.

"Socrates!" exclaimed Zeuxis in a high voice, pushing the other artist arrogantly aside. "My dear friend, my fellow art-lover, how good of you to come to see my work! I regret it is not yet finished."

Parrhasius nodded to the two older

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men, but only slightly, as though his crown might topple. "Are we to have another contest?" he smiled faintly.

It had been the talk of Athens, not too long before, that the rivals had agreed to a public showing of their best works. Zeuxis had displayed a portrait of a boy holding a bunch of grapes, and it was so realistic — or so gossip said — that it deceived birds which swept down to peck at the luscious fruit. But when Parrhasius was asked to unveil his panel, it was discovered — to Zeuxis's dismay — that the heavy drapery that had seemed only a covering was, in fact, the painting. It was after this triumph that Parrhasius crowned himself and took to wearing the purple.

Socrates looked at the two intently. "We shall indeed have a contest," he said.

"Then I take it," said Parrhasius in a deep baritone, "that you have seen my mural of Apollo beating the flute player."

Socrates: I have seen both that and Zeuxis's Endymion. And I should like to know more about both. If Zeuxis will give us leave, let us, Parrhasius, speak first of yours.

Zeuxis's restless eyes glanced over the other three men and the slave who had returned with them. He pressed his lips into a trembling, moist smile and nodded, adjusting the checkered mantle with fastidious hands.

Socrates: Parrhasius, we two have spoken of art before. I recall that we agreed that whereas men copy the gods, artists copy men, did we not?

Parrhasius: Yes, I recall that we did.

Socrates: And it was your feeling that art should mimic faithfully the actions of men?

Parrhasius: And their states of mind, too, Socrates.

Socrates: By state of mind do you mean their character, Parrhasius? Or what they are thinking at a particular moment?

Parrhasius: Their thoughts.

Socrates: Perhaps we should qualify it even further. Not their thoughts so much, would you say, as their feelings, their reactions to what is inflicted upon them?

Parrhasius: That would be more correct, Socrates.

Socrates: Do you feel you convey this in the portrait of Marsyas you have painted inside?

Parrhasius: I shall have, when it is completed.

Socrates: And what is left to be done?

Parrhasius: I wish to add a few refinements to the face and hair.

Socrates: The body is finished?

Parrhasius: As finished as bodies ever are for me.

Socrates: You don't feel the limbs still need more work?

Parrhasius: It is Zeuxis who prides himself on knowing bone structure and such things.

Socrates: Then, Parrhasius, you were working on the face today?

Parrhasius: I would have, but it was too cloudy to get the proper light.

Socrates: And what do you do when you cannot paint?

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Parrhasius: Today I took a walk on the banks of the Ilissus. But what of that?

Socrates: A charming place to walk. You were alone?

Parrhasius: Yes, alone.

Socrates turned now to the other artist, who was fidgeting with his checkered mantle and pushing the blond curls off his forehead with slender, nervous fingers.

Socrates: Now, Zeuxis, perhaps you will tell us in what fashion you disagree with Parrhasius in matters of art, for I know you are lively opponents.

Zeuxis: I can achieve greatness without resorting to his cruel . . .

Parrhasius interrupted him with a snort. "You would do anything for what you call beauty!" he snapped.

Zeuxis: For beauty one does not have to resort to violence!

Parrhasius: And for truth, Zeuxis, one can crush beauty underfoot!

Socrates: Gentlemen, please! A few more questions, Zeuxis, and then we can talk more about truth. You say you seek beauty in art. Is this beauty as the gods have conceived it, or as an artist perceives it in man?

Zeuxis: The latter, Socrates.

Socrates: And do you, as Parrhasius does, strive to capture in your work the beauty of a man's emotions?

Zeuxis: I do not think emotions are beautiful, Socrates. I prefer to copy beauty in perfect repose, so long as it makes for a true picture.

Socrates: True to life, you mean?

Zeuxis: If that is my subject, yes.

Socrates: And I take it that on this cloudy day, you also were unable to paint?

Zeuxis: Parrhasius paints in the afternoons, but I in the morning. There was sunlight before noon.

Socrates: And in the afternoon?

Zeuxis: I was weary after the morning's work. I slept this afternoon, as I often do.

Socrates: Now then, my friends, let us go within the gates and see what truths we can discover.

The quartet walked to the west portico where Socrates stood aside to watch the two artists make their macabre discovery. Zeuxis paled and bade the slave of Mnesicles to support him. Parrhasius reddened with anger. He turned to glare at Zeuxis.

"If this is your trick," he menaced the artist, "I'll thrash you till Apollo takes the whip!"

"Do you know the boy?" Socrates asked coolly. Both artists protested they had never seen the young man before. They glowered at each other, but there was a deep perplexity in their faces and silently they turned to Socrates.

Mnesicles, looking from one to the other of the artists, at length muttered to the philosopher: "Could either of them use a corpse for a model, Socrates, without attracting unwelcome attention?"

Socrates: We happened on the body just after the gates were closed and neither of them was here. But do you think we would have shown unseemly curiosity if an artist pretended to

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paint from so still, so apparently obedient a model?

Mnesicles: Someone would surely have seen the blood.

Parrhasius: And do you think I would leave a dead body here until morning, for Zeuxis to come upon?

Socrates: If you wished to paint from such a model, I think you would have decided yourself that the morning sun is sufficient.

Zeuxis: And you're cold-blooded enough to do such a thing, Parrhasius! You'd torture to get that look on the face of Marsyas!

Parrhasius: I . . . I will admit that, but . . .

Socrates: That is precisely why I fail to see any possibility that Parrhasius is guilty of this crime.

Mnesicles: I'm afraid I don't see that at all!

Socrates: It was a quick death, we are agreed?

Mnesicles: Yes, certainly — a vicious blow on the head.

Socrates: And do you think, then, that he would use a *dead* man from which to copy Marsyas's living agony?

Mnesicles: But, Socrates, how else would you account for the extraordinary similarity of the pose?

Socrates: I think the body was placed thus to lead us to your error, Mnesicles.

Mnesicles: Then. . . . Where is Zeuxis?

For the first time they noticed that Zeuxis had slipped away. Parrhasius flushed with indignation, and Mnesicles began to wring his hands. Then he suddenly clapped his hands and blurted out: "Of course, of course! The sleeping Endymion! I'll send my boy to fetch him!"

Socrates: It is not necessary, Mnesicles. I rather think he was too ill to stay. He's probably outside the gates, waiting for us. It is not Zeuxis who is the murderer.

Mnesicles: How can you say that, Socrates?

Socrates: You will recall, Mnesicles, that when I first questioned them they both agreed they strive for true copies of men. If Parrhasius used a model for the tortured Marsyas, you may be sure the model was tortured. And likewise, if Zeuxis used a model for the sleeping Endymion, you may be equally sure the model would be sleeping. Neither of them needed a model for death.

Mnesicles: Then we are left with an unidentified slave killed for an unknown reason.

Socrates: Perhaps not. If we assume that neither artist gained by the death, may we not also say that they suffered from it?

Mnesicles: What do you mean, Socrates?

Socrates: Should either artist have been blamed for the murder, would the city punish the one and retain the other? Or, since they are working as a team, wouldn't the entire project be discontinued?

Mnesicles: I suppose the scandal would cause the latter.

Socrates: And, with money left unspent that would have gone into the

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decoration of the unfinished Propylaea, do you suppose the city might authorize the completing of the structure itself? Indeed, Mnesicles, was that not your supposition when you killed your slave this evening?

Mnesicles backed toward the wall. Parrhasius moved toward him, fists clenched. "Confess!" said the artist.

Mnesicles: Certainly not! It is all the slimmest of conjecture. None of you recognized the body as that of my slave!

Socrates: But a gentleman of your position does not enter the market place with only one attendant, Mnesicles. You ought to have sent this lad to fetch another.

Parrhasius: Yes, the boy here! I've no doubt you will need his help in this. Wait until he testifies!

Socrates glanced at the slave and then at Mnesicles. He touched his beard with a speculative gesture. "It is a pity," he said, "that our laws require that slaves be tortured to get their testimony—a pity we cannot confirm the truth without such means."

Mnesicles looked affectionately at the sixteen-year-old who served him. The slave hunched his shoulders almost imperceptibly and pulled in his chin like a stubborn child awaiting a disciplinary blow. His eyes were frightened. He smiled crookedly at his master.

"I will say nothing," he whispered bravely.

"Will they make the boy testify," Mnesicles asked softly then, "if I confess?"

**Note:**

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*Inspector Tarrant's manhunting motto: When in deep water, consult armchair-detective Miss Phipps*

# 4. THE SIGNIFICANT LETTER

*by PHYLLIS BENTLEY*

"MISS PHIPPS," SAID DETECTIVE-Inspector Tarrant, "you mustn't blame your maid for my intrusion into your study this morning. She told me you were writing and forbade me to disturb you; but I pushed past her and came in. My need of you is so grave, so urgent, that I feel sure you will forgive me when you hear it."

The little novelist, surprised at her desk, had looked up at his entry with a bad-tempered frown on her round pink face. She hated to be disturbed at work, even by the large young man whom she had enjoyed assisting with advice in previous investigations. But his manner today was so unusually grave and formal, his agreeable face so pale and set, that she realized that the human importance of his errand exceeded that of the love scene she was writing, and threw aside her pen without hesitation. She smoothed down her mop of white hair, ruffled in the excitement of composition, looped back over one ear the chain which moored her old-fashioned pince-nez to the button on her substantial chest, and with the decks thus cleared, as it were, for action, turned to him with an encouraging smile.

"Sit down," she said, "and tell me all about it. I am entirely at your disposal for as long as you wish. There is nothing, I hope, the matter with your dear wife?"

"No, thank goodness. It's not Mary," said Tarrant. "It was she who urged me to come to you." Miss Phipps sighed her relief and gazed at him expectantly. The detective made an effort to control himself, and began in a stifled tone:

"The occurrence took place at Brittlesea."

It was Miss Phipps's habit to joke pleasantly with her friend about the excess of crime in his county of Southshire, and especially in the flourishing seaside resort of Brittlesea. This morning, however, she perceived that jokes were out of place, and merely nodded.

"The reason why I seek your help so urgently," went on Tarrant at once, grateful for her forbearance, "is that the man under suspicion for the crime — and the evidence undoubtedly justifies the suspicion — is my brother."

Miss Phipps leaned forward and laid her hand for a moment on Tarrant's knee, then withdrew it and sat back, without speaking.

"The crime in question," continued Tarrant hoarsely, "is assault and battery, and by this time it may have



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become murder, as it is feared the victim will not recover."

The look of distress on Miss Phipps's pink face deepened.

"Tell me frankly," she said in her kindest tone, "do you really fear your brother may have done it? Or is it just that circumstances are against him?"

Tarrant hesitated.

"Tom wouldn't hurt a fly," he said. "He's the gentlest, kindest fellow that ever lived — under normal conditions. But he went through the first World War and got a piece of shrapnel in his head —"

"He's older than you, then?" said Miss Phipps.

"Yes — that's one of the points which will tell against him," said Tarrant. "He's the eldest of the family and I'm the youngest; he's in his fifties. He was always my hero when I was a lad," he added.

"Why should his age tell against him?" inquired Miss Phipps.

"It was a crime of jealousy," said Tarrant, sombre.

Miss Phipps sighed. "A *crime passionnel*," she said. "I see. In that case, you had better give me full descriptions of the persons concerned."

"If you don't mind," said Tarrant, "I'll just tell you the actual occurrence first — to get it off my chest."

"As you wish," conceded Miss Phipps. "But don't tell me too much; don't let me approach the story with a preconceived notion of the characters which may be quite the wrong one. State the climax briefly."

"Richard Ellison, a motor salesman in the Brittlesea Royal Garage," said Tarrant, "was found half dead in the garage yesterday morning."

"Half dead," repeated Miss Phipps, dissatisfied. "I begged for brevity, but accuracy is even more essential. Please make your statement more precise. The man was injured? How?"

"He lay against one of the interior garage walls, unconscious, with his head crushed," continued Tarrant grimly. "His injuries were frightful; he must have been attacked with a huge weapon, wielded with tremendous strength. From evidence by his family and the garage employees, Ellison was last seen in the garage at 8 o'clock the previous night. My brother is a man of great height and strength; he was seen going into the garage that night; his fingerprints have been found on the door; he had been heard to threaten Ellison. Since Ellison had been going about with Edna to a scandalous extent for some weeks there is a strong motive —"

"Stop, stop!" cried Miss Phipps. "This is, as I foresaw, quite the wrong approach to the problem. Action always springs from character, and may be deduced therefrom, but character cannot be deduced from a single action, still less from a partial account of it. Please begin at the right place, with a description of your brother and of Richard Ellison."

"My brother has farmed my father's land since his death," complied Tarrant. "He is six foot two in height, and correspondingly broad. He is

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dark in complexion; dark hair going gray, brown eyes. He went through a good deal between the wars, you know; economic worries; agriculture wasn't too easy at that time."

"Is he what you would call a handsome man?" asked Miss Phipps.

"No," replied Tarrant bluntly. "He's just a decent, honest, ordinary chap like myself. Very reliable, very kind. Fond of children. Good to animals but not soft about them. Decent to his laborers. Never let anybody down in his life. But perhaps," he added sadly, "a little dull to a woman. Women want something livelier, you know."

"That," said Miss Phipps sternly, "depends on the woman. Who is she in this case?"

"His wife," said Tarrant.

Miss Phipps exclaimed distressfully.

"You think he's just the sort of chap to resent that, though slow to mind anything else?" said Tarrant. "That's what I feel too, you see."

"Go on," urged Miss Phipps. "Go *on*. Who and what is she? Much younger than your brother, I gather from what you said."

"Yes. She's twenty-four," said Tarrant. "They were married three years ago."

"Was she of local parentage?"

"No, she was a Londoner, an attendant at one of those fruit and chocolate stalls on the railway station. In fact," he said bluntly, "we thought it a bit of a misalliance for Tom, and her family thought the same for her. A ramshackle, inconvenient house in the wilds of Southshire — such a dull county, too. That's what they thought of Starwick Farm, and Edna thinks it still."

"And they've been married three years. Any children?"

Tarrant shook his head.

"And are they sorry about that — or glad?" demanded Miss Phipps.

Tarrant colored. "How should I know?" he said.

"My dear boy," said Miss Phipps sternly, "this is no time for misplaced delicacy. You know perfectly well — please answer the question."

"Tom is sorry, but Edna is glad," said Tarrant gruffly.

"What is she like, this Edna?"

"Fair and pretty," said Tarrant promptly. "Blonde hair, beautifully waved. Large gray eyes. Small tip-tilted nose. Small mouth, very red. Very smart in her dress."

"Do you mean by that," inquired Miss Phipps with interest, "quiet colors and no jewelery; tweeds and big gloves in the morning?"

Tarrant hesitated. "Something rather livelier than that," he said. "She's a pretty little thing."

"Lipstick and plucked eyebrows, bright well-fitting jumpers, and lots of handbags to match?" suggested Miss Phipps.

"That's right," said Tarrant. "Very neat and bright and pretty."

"Were you ever," asked Miss Phipps hesitantly — "forgive me, but it's really very important — were you ever just a little in love with her yourself?"

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Tarrant colored again. "Yes," he said gruffly. "Just a bit, at first. She was the first girl I had ever seen much of, not having sisters, you know. But when I realized how I was feeling, I cut out going to Starwick, for Tom's sake."

"Very proper," approved Miss Phipps.

"And then I met Mary," concluded Tarrant.

"Just so. I shall not ask you," said Miss Phipps kindly, "whether Edna encouraged your advances or not, because I don't believe you would know the answer to that question —"

"I never made any advances," put in Tarrant.

"— but I shall ask you," pursued Miss Phipps, "whether she seemed to resent your withdrawal. When you returned to the farm after some time, did she seem to resent your disappearance, or your reappearance, or both — or neither?"

"Neither," replied Tarrant. "She was just the same as usual. I'll be honest, and say that partly I rather resented her being so offhand when she hadn't seen me for six months, and partly I was relieved."

"Just so. She's not vicious, then, not a vixen, not a *femme fatale*."

"I don't know what that means," objected Tarrant.

"Just an ordinary little suburban type, poor child," continued Miss Phipps compassionately. "Used to bustle and movement and quick Cockney talk and lights and shops. Married to a man twice her age, with a disability, and plunged into the country, miles from anywhere."

"There's Starwick village just down the lane," protested Tarrant. "And it's only five miles to Brittlesea, and there's a bus."

"Sheep. Cows. Turnips. Fields. Trees," observed Miss Phipps, shaking her head. "Her taste in clothes isn't appreciated, and if she fires one repartee at a man, the village thinks she's flirting, and purses its lips. Husband good, and she loves him as much as she's capable of loving; but she wants fun without responsibility, and that, my dear boy, is oddly enough, impossible. All the best fun comes from responsibilities joyously accepted. Therefore, the tedium suffered by the Ednas of this world is so dreadful as to excite pity."

"You're right, I daresay, but you're making it sound even worse for Tom," said Tarrant, turning pale.

"Truth, we must have truth," said Miss Phipps firmly. "If Tom is innocent it can't hurt him; if he is guilty it can't hurt him worse than he's hurt himself. We have elucidated Tom and Edna; now for Richard Ellison. Describe him."

"The worst of it is," said Tarrant gloomily, "that he's a very nice lad."

"No!" exclaimed Miss Phipps, startled. "You surprise me."

"Yes, he's a nice boy," said Tarrant. "I only hope I oughtn't to say, was. A tall, fair, lively fellow. Partner with his father in the Royal Garage. He's a salesman now, takes prospec-

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tive clients out in cars and gives driving lessons and so on; but he used to be on the mechanical side — he's a skilled motor engineer. In fact, he's inventing something now, I forget what exactly."

"Something to do with synchromesh gears?" suggested Miss Phipps.

The detective looked startled.

"Didn't I tell you I was going to buy a little car?" said Miss Phipps in surprise. "I'm learning to drive it now."

"Well, Dick Ellison —" began Tarrant again.

"Don't tell me too much at once," said Miss Phipps. "You're apt to crowd your material. Pause a moment, and let me recreate the poor lad in my imagination."

Tarrant was respectfully silent.

"I should never have believed," exclaimed Miss Phipps suddenly, "that your brother would attack a nice boy like that."

"That's exactly right!" exclaimed Tarrant.

"Surely he would be fond of a boy like that! He might warn him about his wife, but never attack him, surely. And the injuries, you said, were very severe?"

"Terrible," said Tarrant. "The right side of his face and body were really — smashed. Surgeon says they are compatible with a heavy left-handed blow from a blunt instrument with one sharp edge."

"Left-handed," said Miss Phipps. "I see. Found the weapon?"

"It's suggested," said Tarrant, "that the weapon was a large coal-hammer, standing in the shed of Starwick Farm. The head of the hammer showed no trace of such a use, but a piece of bloodstained sacking was found stuffed away in a basket in the same shed."

"That," said Miss Phipps, "is very serious. And still, I can't believe it. If Dick Ellison had been one of these modern street-corner lads, a glib young man with waved hair and a distaste for manual labor — yes, I could understand it. But a tall, upstanding chap, and a skilled workman! No. There's something wrong somewhere. You've missed something," said Miss Phipps crossly. "Tell me the chronology of the crime as far as you know it."

"The police reconstruction is this," said Tarrant. "Last week Tom had a row with Ellison at the Royal Garage. Tom was heard to say: *Once and for all, I forbid you. It's got to stop, you understand, or I'll not be answerable for the consequences.* On the evening of the murder, Tom, who had been absent on business since lunch time, returned home, as witnesses from the village can testify, about 9:30 P.M. The theory is that he found Ellison with his wife; there was a row, and Tom attacked him. He then put Ellison, unconscious, in the car, and drove him back to Brittlesea."

"I didn't know he had a car. You said Edna could reach Brittlesea by bus."

"That's right," said Tarrant. "Because Edna can't drive. When they

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were first married she tried to learn, but she was very nervous and Tom wouldn't let her go on; the roads there are pretty busy, you know."

"I see," said Miss Phipps thoughtfully. "So Tom is supposed to have struck down Ellison at Starwick, and taken him back to the Royal Garage. How did Tom enter the garage?"

"With Ellison's key."

"Witnesses in the village saw him driving to Brittlesea? And back?"

"Well, no. But at that hour it's pretty quiet in Starwick — they go to bed early. Besides, it's dark at 10 o'clock, and he may have driven without lights. We may still find witnesses — the police," added Tarrant painfully, "are advertising. He was seen to go to the Royal Garage that evening, but it's true there's some discrepancy about the times."

"Who found Dick in the morning?"

"His father."

"Dear, dear!" said Miss Phipps sadly. "How terrible! There's no loophole at that end either."

"No. And you see," said Tarrant with an effort, "how it tells against Tom that he made no attempt to get a doctor or to take Ellison home."

"Did you see Ellison then?"

"No. Old Mr. Ellison got him off at once to the hospital. But I saw the place where he had lain. It was quite plainly marked," said Tarrant grimly. "The garage is a big place, with a huge central shed, strewn with cars at all angles and in all stages of repair. Ellison had his invention apparatus at the far end, and his body lay near there against the wall, partly concealed by his bench, which had been dragged in front of it."

"Why do the police believe the attack occurred at Starwick?" asked Miss Phipps. "I see no evidence for it."

"The hammer and the sacking are in the Starwick shed, remember. Also, if Ellison had been working late in the Royal — at his invention, as he often did — he'd have been wearing overalls. When last seen by the employees at the Royal he *was* wearing them; but in the morning the overalls were found hanging up behind the door. But wherever it happened, Tom was seen to go into the garage that night, and his fingerprints are on the door."

"What did your brother say when he was informed of the charge?"

"He seemed astounded, I'm told," replied Tarrant. "I was not present myself. Tom looked an innocent man, they say, until Edna gave it all away. She screamed out, 'Oh, I was afraid of this!' and fainted, and hasn't been fit to answer questions since. After that, Tom turned quiet and queer, and wouldn't answer questions."

"Well, well," murmured Miss Phipps gravely. Then she said, "I believe that clinches it."

"You do?" said Tarrant, his face white.

"Yes. It's a very painful and tragic affair," said Miss Phipps sadly. "That bright young life, perhaps thrown away, perhaps permanently damaged, just for mere vanity and silliness.

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Terrible. It will be a lesson to Edna that she'll never forget all her life, but of course that doesn't help Dick Ellison."

"Or Tom," said Tarrant.

Miss Phipps gave him a look of annoyance. "He *must* forgive her," she said firmly. "They must make a new life together, freer and finer than before."

"But, Miss Phipps!" protested Tarrant. "My brother —"

"Just a few final details to get everything clear," said Miss Phipps, unheeding. "Tell me what your brother had been doing on the day of the crime. He had, I imagine, taken a journey away from Brittlesea by train?"

"Yes," agreed Tarrant, surprised. "He'd been to London on the afternoon express, on some legal business."

"He drove in to Brittlesea in the early afternoon, left the car at the garage to be cleaned," said Miss Phipps, "and walked to the garage to pick it up, at night."

"That's what he says, certainly," said the perplexed Tarrant. "It seems Edna went with him to Brittlesea to do some shopping, and returned by bus."

"Clearer and clearer," said Miss Phipps. "Now you know, my dear boy, your observation in this case has been lacking in shrewdness — really it has. Your brother's car was examined for traces of Ellison's transport in it, no doubt. Was anything unusual found in it?"

"Nothing at all."

"Was there anything unusual lying on the floor of the Royal Garage?"

"Only Ellison," muttered Tarrant.

Miss Phipps was suddenly exasperated. "Have there, anywhere in this case, appeared two metal plates with a significant letter upon them?"

Tarrant gaped. "Whatever made you think of those?" he said. "There were two of those 'learner' plates, with the letter L on them, lying on the bench in front of Ellison."

"Exactly," snapped Miss Phipps. "And one of them was slightly damaged, wasn't it?"

"One was bent a little, yes. But —"

"Poor little Edna," interrupted Miss Phipps.

"You don't seem to realize, Miss Phipps," cried Tarrant, "that if Dick Ellison dies, my brother will swing for his murder!"

"Oh, no, he won't," said Miss Phipps kindly.

"If not Tom, then who?" asked Tarrant.

"Nobody," said Miss Phipps.

"Nobody! But why not?"

"Because, my dear," replied Miss Phipps, her eyes beaming behind her pince-nez, "no murder was committed. It's a deeply pathetic story, which may have a terrible ending, though we will hope not, but at least there's no malice about it."

"What do you mean?" gasped Tarrant.

"Dismiss from your mind altogether the murder-by-a-jealous-husband idea," explained Miss Phipps, "and let us see what we have left. A

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young married woman, bored, with very few duties, in a farm which seems to her remote; forbidden to use the car — that is, forbidden her easiest and best means of reaching the kind of life she loves. When she goes by bus, the villagers probably talk of her neglect of her household. In the Brittlesea Royal Garage we have a kindly, lively, agreeable fellow of her own age who, on your own telling, is accustomed to give lessons in driving. Local gossip maintains that Edna and Dick have been going about a great deal together, while Edna's husband is engrossed in his farm duties. Where have Dick and Edna gone together? Where have local gossips seen them? How have they gone together? In what? In Tom's car, obviously, when it was available — in one from the Royal Garage when Tom's car was not. The Starwick gossip of flirtation emerges, when examined, as the record of a mere series of driving lessons, given secretly. It was very naughty of Edna, and foolish of Dick, and they have both paid for it dearly. The quarrel between Ellison and Tom, overheard the previous week, surely related to this too. Tom has got wind of the driving lessons, and forbids them; he knows Edna, he knows she is unfit for the sudden emergencies of the crowded modern roads, and he won't be answerable for the consequences if she tries to drive. But Edna persists in the lessons, and Dick humors her; and the evening of that fatal day was to have been their triumphant climax. Tom and Edna go in to Brittlesea together, and Tom's car is left in the Royal Garage; Dick arranges to be there, as he often is, working late; Edna does her shopping, then calls at the Royal, and with Dick at her side — without his overalls, naturally — is to drive gaily to the station to meet Tom, who will thereby be convinced that his little wife, whom he thinks so silly, is really able to drive his car. But unhappily it didn't work out that way. Edna arrives, yes, and climbs into the car in the garage and proudly starts the engine, while Ellison begins to fasten on one of the 'learner' signs required by law — the one in front. They laugh and talk and are innocently happy together. And then Dick instructs her to reverse the car — towards the door."

"Yes?" gasped Tarrant.

"And she doesn't back up," said Miss Phipps sadly. "She's put the car into the wrong gear, and as soon as she releases the brake and lets out the clutch *the car moves forward!* Dick is there, right in front of it, just rising from attaching the L plate. Edna shrieks, loses her head, and jams her foot on the brake — she thinks. Really she has put her foot on the accelerator — hard. It's so easy to do, you know, when you're a muddle-headed learner. I'm not muddle-headed myself," said Miss Phipps calmly, "so I have never made the same mistake; but Edna is flustered and nervous. And there is poor Dick Ellison crushed against the wall before he knows what hit him."

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"Good lord!" said Tarrant.

"Then Edna loses her head completely. She thinks he's dead. They're alone in the garage, nobody has seen them. She finally manages to reverse the car, then, mad with panic, snatches up some rough sacking and cleans the front of it, tears off the revealing 'learner' plates, pulls the bench forward to hide the body, stuffs the telltale sacking into her basket, and runs off."

"But Tom —"

"When your brother came, as he had arranged with Ellison, to fetch his car," said Miss Phipps soberly, "he calls out to Dick, but there is no answer. It's growing dark and Tom is late, so he drives off without waiting any longer. The next morning he's accused of a murderous assault on Dick, and his wife screams that she had feared it. Why did she fear it? — which means expect it, thinks poor Tom; has she given him cause to murder another man? Plainly she has, thinks he. Do you wonder then that Tom has been strange and quiet? But after all it was only an accident; Tom and Edna must forgive each other and start over again."

"But Edna —" began Tarrant. "Manslaughter —"

He was interrupted by a ring on the telephone which stood on Miss Phipps's desk. Miss Phipps took up the instrument, listened a moment, then handed it to the detective.

"The Brittlesea Infirmary."

Tarrant snatched at the receiver. "Detective-Inspector Tarrant speaking," he said in a cold formal tone. "Yes." He listened intently. "Yes? Yes. Yes!"

He replaced the receiver and turned to Miss Phipps.

"The doctor gives you hope there won't be a trial for manslaughter," said the little novelist promptly.

"How do you know that?" demanded Tarrant with a grin.

"My dear boy!" cried Miss Phipps, beaming. "Give me credit for an elementary knowledge of the human face and its primary expressions."

"I give you credit for a good deal more than that," said Tarrant gratefully.

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*James M. Cain was born in 1892 in Annapolis, Maryland. He attended Washington College, Chestertown, Maryland, where his father, James W. Cain, was president, and it was from this college that James M. received his B.A. in 1910 and his M.A. in 1917. From 1917 until 1931— except for two years in France during World War I and one year as professor of journalism at St. John's College in Annapolis — Mr. Cain was a working newspaperman, on the "Sun" and the "American" in Baltimore and the "World" in New York. His first great encouragement to turn to fiction came from H. L. Mencken in Baltimore, and it was editor Mencken who bought and published Mr. Cain's first story. Since 1931 Mr. Cain has spent most of his time writing novels, with occasional stints of motion-picture work.*

*Here is Mr. Cain's story of a Washington code clerk and a blonde whose pleated orange skirt flickered around her like flame. They met in a little café called Mike's Joint, just over the D.C. line, and the blonde looked like a* **Bookie's Moll** *. . . A tough yarn —* **Black Mask** *out of Esquire — by the author of* THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE, *acknowledged by most critics to be a contemporary classic in the literature of crime.*

# 13. PAY-OFF GIRL

*by JAMES M. CAIN*

I MET HER A MONTH AGO AT A LITTLE café called Mike's Joint, in Cottage City, Maryland, a town just over the District line from Washington, D. C. As to what she was doing in this lovely honkytonk, I'll get to it, all in due time. As to what I was doing there, I'm not at all sure that I know, as it wasn't my kind of place. But even a code clerk gets restless, especially if he used to dream about being a diplomat and he wound up behind a glass partition, unscrambling cables. And on top of that was my father out in San Diego, who kept writing me sarcastic letters telling how an A-1 canned-goods salesman had turned into a Z-99 government punk, and wanting to know when I'd start working for him again, and making some money. And on top of that was Washington, with the suicide climate it has, which to a Californian is the same as death, only worse.

Or it may have been lack of character. But whatever it was, there I sat,

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at the end of the bar, having a bottle of beer, when from behind me came a voice: "Mike, a light in that 'phone booth would help. People could see to dial. And that candle in there smells bad."

"Yes, Miss, I'll get a bulb."

"I know, Mike, but when?"

"I'll get one."

She spoke low, but meant business. He tossed some cubes in a glass and made her iced coffee, and she took the next stool to drink it. As soon as I could see her I got a stifled feeling. She was blonde, a bit younger than I am, which is 25, medium size, with quite a shape, and good-looking enough, though maybe no raving beauty. But what cut my wind were the clothes and the way she wore them. She had on a peasant blouse, with big orange beads dipping into the neck, black shoes with high heels and fancy lattice-work straps, and a pleated orange skirt that flickered around her like flame. And to me, born right on the border, that outfit spelled Mexico, but hot Mexico, with chili, castanets, and hat dancing in it, which I love. I looked all the law allowed, and then had to do eyes front, as she began looking, at her beads, at her clothes, at her feet, to see what the trouble was.

Soon a guy came in and said the bookies had sent him here to get paid off on a horse. Mike said have a seat, the young lady would take care of him. She said: "At the table in the corner. I'll be there directly."

I sipped my beer and thought it over. If I say I liked that she was payoff girl for some bookies, I'm not telling the truth, and if I say it made any difference, I'm telling a downright lie. I just didn't care, because my throat had talked to my mouth, which was so dry the beer rasped through it. I watched her while she finished her coffee, went to the table, and opened a leather case she'd been holding in her lap. She took out a tiny adding machine, some typewritten sheets of paper, and a box of little manila envelopes. She handed the guy a pen, had him sign one of the sheets, and gave him one of the envelopes. Then she picked up the pen and made a note on the sheet. He came to the bar and ordered a drink. Mike winked at me. He said: "They make a nice class of business, gamblers do. When they win they want a drink, and when they lose they need one."

More guys came, and also girls, until they formed a line, and when they were done at the table they crowded up to the bar. She gave some of them envelopes, but not all. Quite a few paid her, and she'd tap the adding machine. Then she had a lull. I paid for my beer, counted ten, swallowed three times, and went over to her table. When she looked up I took off my hat and said: "How do I bet on horses?"

". . . You sure you want to?"

"I think so."

"You know it's against the law?"

"I've heard it is."

"I didn't say it was wrong. It's legal at the tracks, and what's all right one

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place can't be any howling outrage some place else, looks like. But you should know how it is."

"Okay, I know."

"Then sit down and I'll explain."

We talked jerky, with breaks between, and she seemed as rattled as I was. When I got camped down, though, it changed. She drew a long trembly breath and said: "It has to be done by telephone. These gentlemen, the ones making the book, can't have a mob around, so it's all done on your word, like in an auction room, where a nod is as good as a bond, and people don't rat on their bids. I take your name, address, and phone, and when you're looked up you'll get a call. They give you a number, and from then on you phone in, and your name will be good for your bets."

"My name is Miles Kearny."

She wrote it on an envelope, with my phone and address, an apartment in southeast Washington. I took the pen from her hand, rubbed ink on my signet ring, and pressed the ring on the envelope, so the little coronet, with the three tulips over it, showed nice and clear. She got some ink off my hand with her blotter, then studied the impression on the envelope. She said: "Are you a prince or something?"

"No, but it's been in the family. And it's one way to get my hand held. And pave the way for me to ask something."

"Which is?"

"Are you from the West?"

"No, I'm not. I'm from Ohio. Why?"

"And you've never lived in Mexico?"

"No, but I love Mexican clothes."

"Then that explains it."

"Explains what?"

"How you come to look that way, and — how I came to fall for you. I am from the West. Southern California."

She got badly rattled again and after a long break said: "Have you got it straight now? About losses? They have to be paid."

"I generally pay what I owe."

There was a long, queer break then, and she seemed to have something on her mind. At last she blurted out: "And do you really want in?"

"Listen, I'm over twenty-one."

"In's easy. Out's not."

"You mean it's habit-forming?"

"I mean, be careful who you give your name to, or your address, or phone."

"They give theirs, don't they?"

"They give you a number."

"Is that number yours, too?"

"I can be reached there."

"And who do I ask for?"

". . . Ruth."

"That all the name you got?"

"In this business, yes."

"I want in."

Next day, by the cold gray light of Foggy Bottom, which is what they call the State Department, you'd think that I'd come to my senses and forget her. But I thought of her all day long, and that night I was back, on the same old stool, when she came in, made a call from the booth, came

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out, squawked about the light, and picked up her coffee to drink it. When she saw me she took it to the table. I went over, took off my hat, and said: "I rang in before I came. My apartment house. But they said no calls came in for me."

"It generally takes a while."

That seemed to be all, and I left. Next night it was the same, and for some nights after that. But one night she said, "Sit down," and then: "Until they straighten it out, why don't you bet with me? Unless, of course, you have to wait until post time. But if you're satisfied to pick them the night before, I could take care of it."

"You mean, you didn't give in my name?"

"I told you, it all takes time."

"Why didn't you give it in?"

"Listen, you wanted to bet."

"Okay, let's bet."

I didn't know one horse from another, but she had a racing paper there, and I picked a horse called Fresno, because he reminded me of home and at least I could remember his name. From the weights he looked like a long shot, so I played him to win, place, and show, $2 each way. He turned out an also-ran, and the next night I kicked in with $6 more and picked another horse, still trying for openings to get going with her. That went on for some nights, I hoping to break through, she hoping I'd drop out, and both of us getting nowhere. Then one night Fresno was entered again and I played him again, across the board. Next night I put down my $6, and she sat staring at me. She said: "But Fresno won."

"Oh. Well say. Good old Fresno."

"He paid sixty-four eighty for two."

I didn't much care, to tell the truth. I didn't want her money. But she seemed quite upset. She went on: "However, the top bookie price, on any horse that wins, is twenty to one. At that I owe you forty dollars win money, twenty-two dollars place, and fourteen dollars show, plus of course the six that you bet. That's eighty-two in all. Mr. Kearny, I'll pay you tomorrow. I came away before the last race was run, and I just now got the results when I called in. I'm sorry, but I don't have the money with me, and you'll have to wait."

"Ruth, I told you from the first, my weakness isn't horses. It's you. If six bucks a night is the ante, okay, that's how it is, and dirt cheap. But if you'll act as a girl ought to act, quit holding out on me, what your name is and how I get in touch, I'll quit giving an imitation of a third-rate gambler, and we'll both quit worrying whether you pay me or not. We'll start over, and —"

"What do you mean, act as a girl ought to act?"

"I mean go out with me."

"On this job how can I?"

"Somebody making you hold it?"

"They might be, at that."

"With a gun to your head, maybe?"

"They got 'em, don't worry."

"There's only one thing wrong with that. Some other girl and a gun, that

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might be her reason. But not you. You don't say yes to a gun, or to anybody giving you orders, or trying to. If you did, I wouldn't be here."

She sat looking down in her lap, and then, in a very low voice: "I don't say I was forced. I do say, when you're young you can be a fool. Then people can do things to you. And you might try to get back, for spite. Once you start that, you'll be in too deep to pull out."

"Oh, you could pull out, if you tried."

"How, for instance?"

"Marrying me is one way."

"Me, a pay-off girl for a gang of bookies, marry Miles Kearny, a guy with a crown on his ring and a father that owns a big business and a mother — who's your mother, by the way?"

"My mother's dead."

"I'm sorry."

We had dead air for a while, and she said: "Mr. Kearny, men like you don't marry girls like me, at least to live with them and like it. Maybe a wife can have cross eyes or buck teeth; but she can't have a past."

"Ruth, I told you, my first night here, I'm from California, where we've got present and future. There isn't any past. Too many of their grandmothers did what you do, they workd for gambling houses. They dealt so much faro and rolled so many dice and spun so many roulette wheels, in Sacramento and Virginia City and San Francisco, they don't talk about the past. You got to admit they made a good state though, those old ladies and their children. They made the best there is, and that's where I'd be taking you, and that's why we'd be happy."

"It's out."

"Are you married, Ruth?"

"No, but it's out."

"Why is it?"

"I'll pay you tomorrow night."

Next night the place was full, because a lot of them had bet a favorite that came in and they were celebrating their luck. When she'd paid them off she motioned and I went over. She picked up eight tens and two ones and handed them to me, and to get away from the argument I took the bills and put them in my wallet. Then I tried to start where we'd left off the night before, but she held out her hand and said: "Mr. Kearny, it's been wonderful knowing you, especially knowing someone who always takes off his hat. I've wanted to tell you that. But don't come any more. I won't see you any more, or accept bets, or anything. Goodbye, and good luck."

"I'm not letting you go."

"Aren't you taking my hand?"

"We're getting married, tonight."

Tears squirted out of her eyes, and she said: "Where?"

"Elkton. They got day and night service, for license, preacher and witnesses. Maybe not the way we'd want it done, but it's one way. And it's a two-hour drive in my car."

"What about — ?" She waved at the bag, equipment, and money.

I said: "I tell you, I'll look it all up

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to make sure, but I'm under the impression — just a hunch — that they got parcel post now, so we can lock, seal, and mail it. How's that?"

"You sure are a wheedling cowboy."

"Might be, I love you."

"Might be, that does it."

We fixed it up then, whispering fast, how I'd wait outside in the car while she stuck around to pay the last few winners, which she said would make it easier. So I sat there, knowing I could still drive off, and not even for a second wanting to. All I could think about was how sweet she was, how happy the old man would be, and how happy our life would be, all full of love and hope and California sunshine. Some people went in the café, and a whole slew came out. The juke box started, a tune called *Night and Day*, then played it again and again.

Then it came to me: I'd been there quite a while. I wondered if something was wrong, if maybe *she* had taken a powder. I got up, walked to the café, and peeped. She was still there, at the table. But a guy was standing beside her, with his hat on, and if it was the way he talked or the way he held himself, as to that I couldn't be sure, but I thought he looked kind of mean. I started in. Mike was blocking the door. He said: "Pal, come back later. Just now I'm kind of full."

"Full? Your crowd's leaving."

"Yeah, but the cops are watching me."

"Hey, what is this?"

He'd sort of mumbled, but I roared it; and as he's little and I'm big it took less than a second for him to bounce off me and for me to start past the bar. But the guy heard it, and as I headed for him he headed for me. We met a few feet from her table, and she was white as a sheet. He was tall, thin, and sporty-looking, in a light, double-breasted suit, and I didn't stop until I bumped him and he had to back up. Some girl screamed. I said: "What seems to be the trouble?"

He turned to Mike and said, "Mike, who's your friend?"

"I don't know, Tony. Some jerk."

He said to her: "Ruth, who is he?"

"How would I know?"

"He's not a friend, by chance?"

"I never saw him before."

I bowed to her and waved at Mike. I said: "I'm greatly obliged to you two for your thoughtful if misplaced effort to conceal my identity. You may now relax, as I propose to stand revealed."

I turned to the guy and said: "I am a friend, as it happens, of Ruth's, and in fact considerably more. I'm going to marry her. As for you, you're getting out."

"I am?"

"I'll show you."

I let drive with a nice one-two, and you think he went down on the floor? He just wasn't there. All that was left was perfume; a queer foreign smell, and it seemed to hang on my fist. When I found him in my sights again

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he was at the end of the bar, looking at me over a gun. He said: "Put 'em up."

I did.

"Mike, get me his money."

"Listen, Tony, I don't pick pockets—"

"Mike!"

"Yes, Tony."

Mike got my wallet, and did what he was told: "Take out that money, and every ten in it, hold it up to the light, here where I can see. . . . There they are, two pinholes in Hamilton's eyes, right where I put them before passing the jack to a crooked two-timing dame who was playing me double."

He made me follow his gun to where she was. He leaned down to her, said: "I'm going to kill you, but I'm going to kill him first, so you can see him fall, so get over there, right beside him."

She spit in his face.

Where he had me was right in front of the telephone booth, and all the time he was talking I was working the ring off. Now I could slip it up in the empty bulb socket. I pushed, and the fuse blew. The place went dark. The juke box stopped with a moan, and I started with a yell. I went straight ahead, not with a one-two this time. I gave it all my weight, and when I hit him he toppled over and I heard the breath go out of him. It was dark, but I knew it was him by the smell. First, I got a thumb on his mastoid and heard him scream from the pain. Then I caught his wrist and used my other thumb there. The gun dropped, it hit my foot, it was in my hand. "Mike," I yelled, "the candle! In the booth! I've got his gun! But for Pete's sake, give us some light!"

So after about three years Mike found his matches and lit up. While I was waiting I felt her arms come around me and heard her whisper in my ear: "You've set me free, do you still want me?"

"You bet I do!"

"Let's go to Elkton!"

So we did, and I'm writing this on the train, stringing it out so I can watch her as she watches mesquite, sage, buttes, and the rest of the West rolling by the window. But I can't string it out much longer. Except that we're goof happy, and the old man is throwing handsprings, that's all.

Period.

New Paragraph.

California, here we come.

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*Remember that fine prize-winning story, C. B. Gilford's "Heaven Can Wait," which won a special award in EQMM's Eighth Annual Contest and which was published in our August 1953 issue? It was the wondrous tale of a mystery writer who died and went to heaven (where, as the author correctly informed us, all mystery writers finally go), learned that he had made the trip upwards as the result of having been murdered, got permission to return to earth so that he could discover his murderer, but despite his 'tec training ran into unexpected difficulties; in the end it was Archangel Michael himself who made the correct deductions and solved the mystery.*

*Well, it seems that there have been other stories about murdered men who have had Heaven's permission to delay their permanent residence up above. No plagiarism, of course — it is one of those inevitable and irresistible themes bound to occur to more than one writer. Charles Alden Peterson got the bright idea in 1944 and wrote it first as a one-act play to "while away the tedium of a 26-day voyage from Hampton Roads to Naples, in a large stateroom shared with 349 other guys in olive drab." With the manuscript in his kit, Mr. Peterson joined the 45th Division in Italy, just prior to its "tour" of southern France, Alsace, the Rhineland, and Bavaria, during the course of which he collected four battle stars. Eventually, Mr. Peterson became a staff writer for "Yank," and it was probably during this period that his one-act play was transformed into a short story which ultimately appeared in "Town & Country," issue of January 1948.*

*Today, Mr. Peterson is a copy director for a Milwaukee advertising agency, which leaves him very little time for writing fiction, and which (as you will surely agree after reading his story) is a colossal pity. His tale of homicide and Heaven is haunting and humorous — or, mixing the frames of reference, devilishly droll. Needless to say, it is very different, in plot and point, from the Gilford version. Happy reading!*

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# 5. MR. PEVERILL RETURNS FOR HIS HAT

*by CHARLES ALDEN PETERSON*

WHEN MR. PEVERILL FIRST SAW the gates he judged them to be about five miles off, though he wasn't sure because there was nothing else in sight with which to compare distances — just the gates, standing there. They rose out of the blue infinity to an enormous height, glistening in the diffused light that seemed to come from everywhere at once, but Mr. Peverill didn't pay too much attention to them. He had just come from his funeral and his mind was still on the uniqueness of the situation.

It had been a lovely affair. The flowers had been all anyone could ask for; many of his friends from the Bar Association had appeared and said kind things; Dr. Thornberry had preached a moving sermon, and Myra . . . Mr. Peverill frowned. There had been something about Myra that puzzled him. True, she had dressed in keeping with the occasion and had appeared both grief-stricken and bravely resigned, and yet — hadn't there been a shade of artificiality about her manner?

Mr. Peverill scratched his ear in a gesture that had been marked in many a courtroom exchange and was once mentioned in a magazine article as connoting shrewd thought. For the first time since he had awakened in the spirit world, Mr. Peverill began to wonder how he had got there.

But when he looked up and found himself within a few yards of the gates, their sheer size drove all other thoughts from his mind. He felt absurdly insignificant beside the tremendous pillars, whose shining capitals were lost in the blue haze above, and wished that he had his hat. A small, dapper, wiry man of about 50, Mr. Peverill was dressed in a handsome morning suit, complete to spats and carnation, and it offended his sense of the fitness of things to be correct in every other detail but a missing hat.

"They ought to know better than to bury people without hats," he grumbled.

Glancing about, Mr. Peverill found set in one pillar an enormous silver bellpush marked *For Service.* He pressed it and there was a long peal of golden-throated bells, succeeded by a growing white radiance from some concealed light that beamed down on him. Then a voice spoke, a voice as deep and resonant as the bells themselves.

"Who is calling, please?"

"Peverill," said Mr. Peverill, trying to locate the speaker. "Gerald K. Peverill, lawyer, of New York City."

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"One moment, please," said the voice, and went on as if checking a list of names. "Peverill, Peverill. . . . Did you say Geoffrey J. Peverill of Liverpool?"

"I did not!" said Mr. Peverill, irritated, as always, at a hint of inefficiency. "I said Gerald K. Peverill of New York."

"I see." The voice seemed puzzled. "Mm-yes, I see."

Mr. Peverill waited, tapping his foot. "Well?" he asked at length.

The voice was apologetic. "Er — Mr. Peverill, we don't seem to have your name in the Book of Expected Arrivals. You're sure you belong here?"

"My dear sir!" exclaimed Mr. Peverill, offended. "If I don't belong here, where do I belong?"

"There's always — er —" the voice coughed, "The Other Place."

"Then why was I sent up here to begin with?" Mr. Peverill inquired.

The voice seemed to think this over, then said, "We'll look you up in the Master Files. . . . Ah, here we are: 'Gerald Kraft Peverill, age fifty-two, senior member of Peverill, Peabody, Forsyth, and Levy, Attorneys. Married 1934 to Myra Watson, aged thirty-five. No children. Murdered, September 6, 1947.' . . ."

"Eh?" said Mr. Peverill, startled.

"You didn't know?" said the voice. "Well, there it is. Just one of those things. Happens to the best of people. 'Record, excellent.' Yes, it's all here, but still your name isn't in the book of arrivals. Dear, dear, how tiresome! I suppose there's been some sloppy work in the clerical department. We'll have to stir them up a bit. They made a mistake like this just the other century and raised no end of — I mean, caused a great deal of trouble. I'm afraid there'll be a slight delay while we check further. About an hour or so."

An easy chair appeared invitingly at Mr. Peverill's side.

"What's this about my being murdered?" asked Mr. Peverill.

"Don't let it bother you," urged the voice. "Just put it out of your mind. After all, what difference does it make now?"

"But who could have done it? I had no enemies."

"I'm sorry. These things are kept strictly confidential," the voice explained. "Do you want to wait?"

Mr. Peverill considered. "An hour, you say?"

"About that. We're a little shorthanded at the moment."

"I'd like to go back for my hat," said Mr. Peverill.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I came away without a hat," explained Mr. Peverill. "I'd like to go back and pick it up."

"I'm afraid that just isn't done, Mr. Peverill!" protested the voice.

"It's the principle of the thing," Mr. Peverill argued. "I just don't feel right in this getup without a hat. Couldn't I dash back and get it? I'll only be a few minutes."

The voice hesitated. "It's highly irregular . . . but since it's more or

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less our fault that you're delayed, I suppose we could arrange it."

The light that had been blazing down on Mr. Peverill began slowly to fade, as did the easy chair. "Here you go!" cried the voice. "But only for one hour, mind."

There was another tremendous peal of the bells, and Mr. Peverill suddenly found himself in his study in New York.

Mr. Peverill looked about him, half surprised to find the room unchanged. It looked exactly the same as he'd left it that night the previous week when he'd gone to Tom O'Brien's for dinner. It was at O'Brien's that he'd been taken ill, he recalled, to die the following day. The words of the voice returned to him: "Murdered, September 6, 1947."

"Hmm!" said Mr. Peverill.

There were soft sounds coming from the living room. He crossed to the paneled door and noiselessly opened it a crack. Two people stood in the room, wrapped in a passionate embrace. The man was Tom O'Brien, tall, lean, good-looking, and, — at the age of 38 an astonishingly successful playwright. The woman, an attractive brunette attired in black, was Mr. Peverill's widow, Myra. Mr. Peverill watched this interesting display of funereal grief for several moments before it broke up.

Tom spoke first. "Well, Myra, my darling, you're free at last," he said. "How does it feel?"

Myra sighed and relaxed into a nearby chair. "Wonderful!" she exclaimed. "Simply wonderful! To be rid of Gerald after all these years!"

Tom smiled down at her. "A celebration would be in order, I should think."

He patted her arm, walked over to the sideboard, and pulled out a cut-crystal decanter and a pair of glasses. "Hello!" he said, in a surprised tone. "How did this get in here?"

Myra turned around to see Tom holding a tiny, well-polished gun.

"Oh, that!" she said, shrugging. "Gerald bought that several years ago during a wave of apartment burglaries and never had a chance to use it. Put it back, dear. Guns make me nervous." She turned around and shivered. "What bores funerals are!"

"I was about to suggest you go to more of them," Tom remarked. "You look stunning in black, you know. Here, my dear. To our future!"

"No, Tom," said Myra. "Let's drink to the man who, by his tactful death, made our future possible. Here's to Gerald!"

"To Gerald! May he whirl merrily in his grave!"

Mr. Peverill threw open the door and stepped into the room. "Thank you," he said dryly.

The glasses dropped to the floor with twin crashes. Myra and Tom stood transfixed.

"Those glasses were Swedish crystal," Mr. Peverill commented with reproof in his tone.

Myra whirled, and hurled herself into Tom's arms with a scream.

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"Tom!" she cried. "I just saw Gerald's ghost!"

"Ghost, my foot!" Mr. Peverill snorted as he came forward. "Stop that nerve-racking noise, Myra, and sit down. I'm not going to bite you."

Tom, busy patting Myra's shoulder, shot him a look of outrage. "What's the big idea, Peverill?" he demanded. "What do you mean by coming around here after you've been properly buried?"

Myra made a noble effort at recovery, detaching herself from Tom and wiping her eyes. "Gerald, is it really you?" she asked. "It's so — so unexpected, seeing you again."

Mr. Peverill wasn't up on his understatements, but he supposed that could rank with the best of them. He poured new drinks for Myra and Tom, handed them without comment, and returned to the sideboard for a glass of charged water for himself. He felt quite calm as he sat down and reached for a cigarette. "I suppose that since I'm interred in Park View Cemetery I can't technically be said to be here, but for our purposes we can skip the technicalities." He inhaled, found that tobacco still tasted good to him, and smiled in satisfaction. "I must compliment you, Myra, on your good taste in arranging the funeral. Everything was exquisitely done. I especially admired the delicate finesse with which you removed my diamond stickpin before having the casket closed. As a last loving gesture, it was superb!"

"I — I wanted something to remember you by, Gerald," said Myra.

There was a strained pause before Myra evidently decided that something was expected of her as hostess and spoke up brightly. "You know, it's very difficult to think of anything to say to one's deceased husband."

"It's a situation which seldom occurs," Tom commented, with another glance of disapproval at Mr. Peverill.

"For instance," Myra continued, maintaining a fixed smile, "how can I say 'How are you?' when it's perfectly obvious that you're — that you're — I mean . . ."

The smile vanished and she broke off with a gulp.

"And it's impossible to ask where you've been," added Tom, getting into the spirit of things, "when it's clear that you've been — I say, old man, where *have* you been?"

Myra broke in hurriedly. "And there's no way of knowing what you'd like to talk about."

Mr. Peverill stirred restlessly. "You might tell me if I had any interesting obituaries," he suggested. "Or were you too distraught to read them? Really, Myra, I only have an hour for my return and, as a quarter of that has already gone, I don't propose to waste the rest of it making idle conversation."

"Only an hour?" Tom echoed. He sipped his highball with a pleased expression.

Mr. Peverill looked at him with speculative eyes. "As a matter of fact, O'Brien, I rather hoped I'd find you here. I think," he said with some

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asperity, "it was very inhospitable of you to murder me the other night."

There were two more crashes — Myra's glass following Tom's by a fractional second. Mr. Peverill winced.

"I *beg* your pardon!" Tom began in indignation.

Mr. Peverill held up his hand. "Please!" he said firmly. "I have it on the highest authority that I was murdered and, come to think of it, that martini tasted very odd indeed. Then, too, you talked all evening about the mystery drama you're writing and all the research you'd done on poisons. The inference is fairly clear."

Tom looked as though he would have liked to protest further, then subsided, glowering. "It wasn't the martini," he said. "It was the consommé."

"No, dear," said Myra. "It *was* the martini."

"Precious, I dropped it in the soup myself."

"Darling, I did the same for the martini!"

"You did?" Why didn't you tell me?"

"Why didn't *you* tell *me*?"

"I thought you might object," said Tom.

Mr. Peverill cleared his throat. "This conversation," he remarked coldly, "is in the worst possible taste."

"Sorry," Tom said. He was silent for a moment, then scowled at Mr. Peverill. "There wasn't anything else to do," he claimed, defensively. "Myra and I — well, we're in love. We knew you'd never agree to a divorce. . . ."

"But you never asked me," interposed Mr. Peverill, to whom the idea of divorce had, for some time, presented itself regularly about the first of every month, along with the bills.

"I'm sorry if we caused you any inconvenience," Tom said, "but it's too late to do anything about it now."

"I wouldn't say that." Mr. Peverill revealed the small automatic he'd taken from the sideboard and pointed it at Tom's monogrammed belt buckle. Tom paled, his expression changing to one of alarm.

"Gerald!" Myra gasped. "You wouldn't!"

"Let's not be hasty about this, old man," urged Tom. "Think of the — the scandal!"

"I flatter myself I'm above that," Mr. Peverill remarked.

"Think of Myra then! How is she going to get all that blood off the living-room rug?"

"The maid doesn't come until Thursday," Myra added helpfully.

"Besides, said Tom, his eyes widening, "if you're not here and I'm found dead, she'll be accused of murder! She'll — she'll — oh, my God!"

Mr. Peverill was unperturbed. "I don't see that it matters whether she's convicted of your murder or mine. Anyway, she could plead self-defense. With a male jury, she'd have excellent chances."

Tom stared at the pistol and his forehead began to gleam moistly.

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"Look at it from your point of view," he said. "You realize, of course, that this knocks your chance of going to Heaven to hell? You know what I mean," he added, as Mr. Peverill looked puzzled. "Are you going to take that chance merely for the pleasure of avenging yourself on me?"

Mr. Peverill pursed his lips and thought for a moment, then shook his head. "I don't believe there's much danger. In the first place, I shall be killing you in self-defense. . . ."

"That's silly! Tom said. "How can it be self-defense, if I die a week after you did?"

"I have the right to protect myself from persons seeking my life, haven't I?"

"Yes, but —"

"Then, by a simple extension, I have the right to avenge myself on someone who took my life. It's a privilege that has been granted to ghosts for centuries. In any case," Mr. Peverill finished, "I don't see how I can possibly be held responsible for an act committed *after* my death. You have no case at all, sir, none at all!"

With a few preliminary sobs, Myra began to snuffle. "You're being terribly cruel, Gerald, after all I've done for you!"

"Such as?" asked Mr. Peverill interestedly.

"Well, such as — such as — " Myra pressed a totally inadequate handkerchief to her nose. "Oh, Gerald! Have you forgotten so soon?" She started to cry, elegantly.

"Somehow that doesn't impress me as much as it used to," said Mr. Peverill.

He glanced at the clock and stood up. "I have very little time left," he told Tom. "And no one has yet advanced a good argument for my permitting you to live."

He cocked the pistol. Tom started to his feet. Myra screamed and covered her eyes.

"Why me?" Tom cried. "She's as much to blame as I!"

Mr. Peverill's finger hesitated, resting lightly on the trigger. . .

Mr. Peverill strolled up to the pearly gates and pressed the bell push, humming softly to himself. The golden-throated bells pealed as before and the light beamed down on him — softly at first, then growing to a white brilliance.

"Mr. Peverill?" inquired the deep, resonant voice.

"Yes, sir."

"We've located your records; they're quite in order."

"Then I may come in?"

The ponderous gates began slowly to open.

"By the way, Mr. Peverill," said the voice, "we were watching you."

"You were?" said Mr. Peverill. "I didn't think of that. I hope you don't think that I asked to go back just because I wanted to . . ."

"Not a bit," the voice replied. "We understand completely. I might add that you handled it neatly."

Mr. Peverill shrugged. "It suddenly

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occurred to me," he said, "that Tom and Myra were about the worst prospects for marriage I could think of — both so self-centered, grasping, and demanding. I thought allowing O'Brien to live might possibly be the best punishment for them both."

"You did quite right, Mr. Peverill," the voice continued. "The legal mind, I suppose."

The gates swung open a few more inches, then stopped. Mr. Peverill pulled his coat into place with an air of satisfaction and lightly touched the carnation in his buttonhole. A frown crossed his face and he snapped his fingers with an exclamation of muttered annoyance.

He had forgotten completely about picking up his hat.

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*Thomas Walsh needs no introduction to EQMM readers — you all know his outstanding work in the mystery field. Mr. Walsh's short stories nearly always deal with crime and the more realistic aspects of detection, but properly speaking they are cop stories — about cops with big hearts, usually enmeshed in human interest situations that might have been reported in the morning newspaper you read today at breakfast or in the subway or on a commuter's train. Yes, give Thomas Walsh a cop and a crime and human beings in a jam, and Mr. Walsh is in his native habitat: real people and real-life problems are his forte.*

*So it is with special pleasure that we now tell you that we have just arranged for a whole series of Thomas Walsh's fine stories, beginning with the one in this issue. This is the story of a man who comes to know a great fear and, through it, attains to an even greater dignity.*

# 9. YOU CAN'T CHANGE SIDES

*by THOMAS WALSH*

ON THAT FEBRUARY FRIDAY AFTER supper George Madden cleared his throat slightly — a small sound that never seemed to vary in the slightest — before he took the envelope out of his breast pocket and put it flat on the table by his plate. Then, taking up his cup, he finished the last of his coffee, cleared his throat again, pressed back the flap of the envelope and took out the crisp notes, handing five of them across the table to Emma, and folding the sixth ten-dollar bill carefully into his wallet. Young Georgie received a quarter in change and broke immediately for the door, whooping; while Emma, after counting the five bills and smoothing them out in her fingers, sighed a bit as she reached for her purse.

"It's a blessed relief to see them," she said. "And I'm always afraid until I do. Friday's a long day, George. All afternoon I can't help thinking —"

"Thinking what, Mama?" George Madden said, and laughed rather loudly. "I never saw such a woman for worry. Do you suppose Sturgis and Klein could get on without me? Do you suppose they could ever let me go? Me, Mama? They've not laid off a man in months now; I wouldn't be surprised any day if they started calling them back. Times aren't as bad maybe as you think they are. They're picking up — all over. I

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don't want you fretting yourself. Remember that, Mama. It's not good for you."

"Yes," Emma said, "I know it's foolish, but I can't help it. All day Friday —"

"Me!" George Madden repeated, and chuckled again as he got up, as if the very idea of Sturgis & Klein's letting him go was too ridiculous for words. But in the front room, with the dinette door closed behind him, his small brown eyes grew tired and veiled, and when he sat in the easy chair by the radio he let the evening paper spread out across his lap, unfolded. Always, after that business was over, George Madden realized bitterly that he should have told her; he was a coward and a fool not to tell her. But always, after the Friday-night supper, when she looked at him and the time had come, he never could seem to open his mouth about it.

Through the week he'd make resolutions and bring very logical reasons into his mind, reasons that convinced him entirely; but somehow on Fridays, after he spent the morning and part of the afternoon in one of the agencies that had his name on its list, he'd go down to the savings bank, draw out sixty dollars, and put it into the Sturgis & Klein envelope he saved now from week to week.

Then, when supper was over, the farce done with, a gray, tired look would come into George Madden's eyes. It was there tonight, while Emma, outside, clattered dishes about in the sink. He should have told her about it, he thought, on that Friday in December, seven weeks ago now, when Mr. Sturgis had called him into the office and told him how damned sorry they were, and how, as soon as things picked up, he'd be the first one to be called back. He should have told her then. Why hadn't he? Wasn't it simple enough, a matter of minutes, no harder to do than slipping a knife into her heart? They'd let him go. And he was pretty old — 48. Jobs —

He closed his eyes and leaned back in his chair, trying not to understand the dark thoughts those seven weeks had stirred in his mind. He was done. And she and Georgie, and the bungalow that had only the second mortgage off it still, were done too. There weren't any jobs. There wasn't, now, a great deal of money in the bank. Some Friday soon he'd come home and look at her silently, watching panic breed and flare in her eyes. "George," she'd say. "Is it — ?"

Outside, now, the sink gurgled as Emma let out the water; in a moment there was a click as she turned off the light. George Madden shook his head bitterly and picked up his paper; when she came in he seemed to be busy reading.

The paper was a refuge, a shield, providing a silence that Emma did not very often break. But tonight the silence was not a shield, but a threat, in which he could feel Emma staring at him. They had shared many things without the need of words; suddenly

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it seemed to George Madden that they must share this too. So he shifted in his seat, coughing and rustling the papers; but in a moment the quietness came back, tighter, thinner, vibrating like a wire in his mind.

In another minute it was unendurable. He put down his paper and rose, yawning elaborately, saying he guessed he'd see if Joe Mack felt like bowling a game. But when he kissed her on his way to the door she put one hand on his arm, and her eyes searched his face.

"George," she said, "you've been so — so queer these past few weeks. Something's worrying you. What is it, George? What's wrong?"

"Mama," George Madden said, and looked severely at her, "will you stop that? You're getting on my nerves. Nothing's wrong. Nothing! Can't you find anything to do but worry yourself over foolishness?"

He snorted as if he were disgusted with her, pulled away his arm, and got his hat and coat in the hall. But the troubled look didn't pass from her face; he could still see it when he waved at her from the door. For a moment, seeing it there, George Madden almost wavered; he could feel the lump of admission and shame rising in his throat. And then he swallowed it; he mumbled something about women's nonsense and went out.

Downstairs, he looked at his watch, and saw that it was just twenty to 8, and as soon as he thought of the time he thought of the man who had wanted to meet him outside the Arlington Hotel at 8:30. For an hour or so tonight, the man had said, he could pick up twenty-five dollars just like snapping his fingers. Eight-thirty, so if he hurried now he could just make it. Still, for an instant, George Madden stood irresolute, not quite sure whether he wanted to make it or not.

Ever since he'd met the man at 2 that afternoon, as he was coming downstairs from the agency on his way to the bank, George Madden hadn't been able to make up his mind about the man, or the job either. Barlow, the man said his name was — thirty-five or -six, well-dressed, a good talker, very sympathetic. He'd started by asking George Madden for a match, and then went on to inquire if he was on his heels. "Looking for something, Jack?" he had asked.

When George Madden admitted that he was, he took his arm and walked to the corner with him. He said he was just on his way upstairs himself, to see if they had a man who could help him out tonight; and if George Madden wanted it, if he'd work a few hours for twenty-five dollars, why, there wasn't any reason why he shouldn't have it, and without paying the agency fee, too.

He was a very friendly man — sharp-faced, shrewd-looking, smooth. George Madden went into a tavern with him, and had one drink. He was, Barlow said, a private detective, and his agency had a divorce case on hand

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now. That was why he needed a man tonight — someone new to the racket, who wouldn't be spotted easily. A man like that would be worth twenty-five dollars to Barlow; and if George Madden wanted to pick that up more easily than he'd ever picked up twenty-five bucks before — well, it was as good as in his pocket.

After they finished their drinks, even though George Madden could not remember definitely agreeing, Barlow got up and shook his hand. Somehow it seemed all settled. Eight-thirty, outside the Arlington Hotel. And if it wasn't an easy twenty-five this Barlow didn't know what an easy twenty-five was. Peeping on people, spying — George Madden hadn't liked that part much. He still didn't, standing on the corner, worrying his lower lip. In the end it was the twenty-five dollars that decided him — that and the bitterness that was habitual in his heart now. Spying — well, why not? Why not, when a man could find nothing else to do?

In the last six weeks George Madden had opened his eyes, and seen for the first time what a queer world it was. He had come to understand that there were only two kinds of people — the ones that had everything they wanted, and the George Maddens who did not even have a job. Sometimes in those seven weeks he had come to hate the other kind, with a fury that occasionally frightened him. It was so unfair! The rich, and their money, the craziness this fellow Barlow had told him of — a man with a nice wife and some kids, perhaps. But it wasn't enough for him; he had to have a girl somewhere, in an apartment, while George Madden, with less than four hundred dollars in the bank and no job —

George Madden didn't only hate that man, he hated all his kind; he hated anyone with money. Thinking of it now, he could feel the hate thickening in his throat. If there was shame in him too, it was swamped in that hate. All the way downtown in the subway he kept it successfully hidden, even from himself.

But when a car pulled in to the curb in front of the Arlington Hotel, and Barlow leaned across from the steering wheel to open the front door for him, his heart began to beat pretty fast. Barlow seemed in high humor.

"Hell!" he said. "It's turned out a cinch. It's like this, Jack: we had a man watching the apartment where our client's husband hangs out with his girl friend, and our man got in right with the superintendent there. It cost a little dough but he fixed the super up, so that he's on our side now. Got that?"

George Madden nodded. He felt uneasy and embarrassed, like a man caught prying at a keyhole.

Chuckling again, Barlow watched him out of the corners of his eyes.

"Well, this super has passkeys for all the apartments, even this one. He got in today when no one was home and cleared it out — receipted bills, checks, a couple of photos, some per-

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sonal letters — stuff that no court is going to question. The super's in Riverside Park now, and he's got the stuff with him. All you do is meet him there and pick it up."

He snorted then, and shook his head with an air of comic disgust.

"If I had known it was going to be that easy I wouldn't have needed anybody, Jack — I'd have picked it up myself. But all this turned up after I left you, understand, and I figure you're entitled to the dough anyway for coming down here. Besides, that twenty-five goes on the expense account; it isn't out of my pocket. So I'm letting it ride. While you're over there picking it up I'll get in touch with the wife; maybe she'll want to see the stuff herself. All you do is meet this guy and pick up the bag he'll give you. Use my name and tell him I'll call him in an hour if everything's okay. Got that straight now?"

George Madden repeated it after him. When he had finished, Barlow nodded.

"This super's a tall guy, around forty. He'll be sitting on the first bench, just inside Riverside Park, with the bag on his lap. You can't miss him. Pick it up and meet me at the Arlington as soon as you can. I'll drop you here for the bus now. Got everything straight?"

George Madden said he had. In the bus, riding crosstown, he thought again that it was a vile way to make a living. But when a man was a rich fool who knew no better —

Tight-lipped, George Madden got off the bus at the end of the line.

It was a damp night for February, clammily chill. Wisps and eddies of gray fog, swirling low over the steel-black water, spread slowly out in thin phantasmal fingers to the trees and benches of the park. No one passed George Madden; the streets, the park itself, seemed deserted. But as soon as he crossed the road and entered the park through a break in the low stone walls he saw the man sitting where Barlow had said he would be, on the end of the bench nearest the entrance.

He was a tall man, with a bag on his knees, and he got quickly to his feet as soon as he saw George Madden. Something abrupt and savage in the movement startled George Madden, so that for a moment he halted, his heart pounding stupidly. Then he went on.

"I'm from Barlow," he said when he was before the tall man. "I'm to take the bag. He'll call you back in an hour if everything's all right."

The tall man, holding out the bag, said nothing. His face was small for his body, rather pale, gaunt and tight-fleshed; and as George Madden took the bag he grabbed his wrist with fingers that dug in like the jaws of a vise. George Madden said: "What's the matter?" and the tall man released his wrist; his eyes, burned out, scorching, had something sick and hopeless in them. "Go on," he said thickly. "Go back. Tell him I'll be waiting."

George Madden felt a little afraid

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of him, and turned quickly away. But the gaunt face had burned itself into his mind; he could not dismiss it. The look on it worried him. And then, in a moment, it wasn't the expression on the features, but the face itself, that was so clear inside him. He had seen it somewhere. He had seen it —

He was halfway down the block on his way to the bus when he remembered where he had seen it. He stopped, and his breath, in a tremendous sickly gasp, stopped too; a cold hand gathered about his heart.

He knew the tall man now. He had seen his picture in the paper that night, while he was sitting by the radio, and for a moment, until he glanced at the column under it, he had hated it. *Courtney Boy Still Missing*, the headline read; *Father Denies Making Contact. Henry R. Courtney, President of the Union Security and Trust Company* —

Once George Madden began to walk again he went on mechanically, almost blindly. Barlow had lied to him. He was not a private detective; he had kidnaped the boy. But because he was smart enough to know that the contact was the difficult part of the job, the most dangerous part, he had had George Madden do that. If the police were waiting, if they were following him now —

Perspiration came out thickly on his brow. He looked back and saw no one, no car even, behind him. A block away on the avenue there were lights, traffic, people; but for a moment, under the urging of that blind panic inside him, he almost turned away from them. Then he went on faster, panting. There'd be a policeman around, or a phone. When he met Barlow again in front of the Arlington —

And then Barlow was in front of him, stepping out of a dark hallway. Barlow was taking his arm and saying in a low, strained voice: "Come on, Jack. Step along now. Fast." There was another man with him who moved in quickly on George Madden's left. They went down dim stairs, through a faintly lit cellar, across a backyard to an alley; in 30 seconds they were through that to the next street, with Barlow's car in front of them, the lights on dim, the motor running. They got in, George Madden and Barlow in front, the other man in back; and they drove east fast, through back streets, none of them speaking.

George Madden's mind was frozen solidly inside him. Only when the street intersections were flickering by them did it tell him that he should have shouted back there, that he should have run, or fought them. Now it was too late; now the man in back would be watching him, ready with a gun in his hand, or a blackjack. If he moved, if he yelled —

"Okay?" Barlow said suddenly, in a husky voice held low by an effort. "Did everything go off the way I said it would, Jack? Did you have any trouble with him?"

His voice roused George Madden

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out of that frozen numbness to a sense of danger. Against the passing street lights Barlow's dark face was etched out sharply; the change in it, the shaky cold edge to his voice, struck George Madden's nerves like a lash of wire. They wouldn't be sure he had recognized Courtney; he had seen him only for a moment in the shadowy park. But if they knew he had recognized him, George Madden realized suddenly, he was lost. If they knew that, he was a dead man.

"No," he said. Everything had been fine. The tall man hadn't said a word. Just handed him the bag.

When a red light stopped them Barlow took his eyes off the rear-view mirror long enough to stare at him from under lowered lids. Lifting the bag from his lap, he watched George Madden even while he hefted it a moment in his hand and then tossed it over the seat to the man in back.

"Hennigan," he said, nodding his head after it. "A friend of mine, Jack. He's giving me a hand tonight, too."

When George Madden said something about being glad to meet him, this Hennigan did not answer. He was a short man with a swarthy face, dull eyes he kept half hidden, small hands held loosely together over the leather bag in his lap. The lights changed, and they went on; in the back there were two metallic snaps as Hennigan opened the bag. After a minute or two he said to Barlow in a sleepy voice: "Okay. It's what you wanted. All of it."

Fifty thousand, George Madden thought. Maybe more. Courtney was a wealthy man. It was over now and they had the money, and if he played his cards right, if he convinced them he was a fool, they'd let him go.

Despite the cold panic inside him, that one thought kept desperately alive. It told him that there lay his one chance of safety; he must make them believe he was a fool, a clown, who knew nothing of what had really happened.

"I hope it's all there," he said, a few blocks on. "Your letters and stuff."

"Sure," Barlow answered slowly. "It is, Jack. You did all right. You did fine."

He added presently that they'd had to change the plans and meet him at the park because this client of theirs hadn't wanted to take any chances; they were on their way now to meet her. George Madden pretended he believed it.

"I bet," he said, "I bet she'll be tickled to see the bag."

Barlow said he guessed she would. They went on uptown, not too fast, stopping at the red lights, keeping in line. Barlow wouldn't spoil it by being careless now; he had thought it out very coldly and thoroughly from the start, George Madden saw.

Barlow was a clever man. He must have conducted the arrangements by phone or mail, settling that way the amount of the ransom, the place where it was to be paid, the time. And in the afternoon he'd hung around outside the cheap agencies

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downtown, where he knew he could find a man hard up. George Madden must have seemed just what he wanted — a timid man, down at the heels, rather seedy, not too smart. George Madden, Barlow would have thought, was the perfect answer. For twenty-five bucks, not knowing what he was doing, he'd take all the chances, all the risk.

The way it was set up Barlow didn't even have to trust him. He'd been watching all the time, from his doorway up the street; so that if it had been a police trap, if George Madden had been seized, in an instant Barlow could have slipped away. Before George Madden could have told his story, long before it would have been believed, Barlow would be miles away.

That flashed vividly and starkly through George Madden's mind as they went on. It wasn't difficult to understand; it hung like a weight of iron in the back of his head while he played the clown, and told Barlow how nice the car rode. Barlow grunted once or twice, but little Hennigan remained quiet; and the memory of his dulled eyes, watching now from the back seat, raised dampness in George Madden's palms.

But he went on talking because he thought that if he were quiet, if he showed any strain, Barlow might guess from that. George Madden knew what would happen then, and he didn't want to die. He mustn't die. There were Emma and Georgie and the bungalow to think of — and the bank account, too, that had dwindled fast these past seven weeks. And there was fear — that most of all, perhaps. All those things kept George Madden's voice going on and on, rambling, as if only the flow of words could keep them concealed.

He didn't think of Courtney, or his boy, or the kidnaping. No one, nothing, mattered now but himself, while Barlow drove steadily uptown, past the end of the elevated line, and on to a quiet country road that had but little traffic.

Five miles in on that they stopped before a big gray house half hidden by a ragged hedge, and when Barlow turned off the ignition and put on his hand brake George Madden's heart contracted again, the remorseless hand closed on it. They'd brought him here to kill him.

By the side of the car Barlow was quiet a moment, watching him. He said finally: "We'll go in — Hennigan and me. You wait, Jack. We won't be long."

George Madden knew he'd won by that; he'd made them believe he was a fool. Relief so intense and breathless flooded up inside him that for a moment he could not speak. Then he nodded, as if it had no importance. "Okay," he said. "I'll wait. This your client's place?"

"What?" Barlow said. He looked around before answering, and his eyes must have seen the For Sale sign planted just outside the hedge as soon as George Madden saw it. Casually he jabbed a thumb at it.

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"Up for sale," he said. "She's trying to get rid of it, Jack. Want to buy?"

He laughed and George Madden laughed too. "That's good," he said. "That's all right. But maybe it's too cheap for me."

On the other side of the car little Hennigan stirred uneasily.

"Listen," he said to Barlow. "You ain't going to —"

Barlow growled, "Come on, come on," and took his arm. George Madden's heart began to beat again. He watched them walk up the gravel road to the dark house; he heard their footsteps fade and die, and deep quietness flow in over them. But for a minute, holding himself tightly in the seat, he did not move. It might be a trap. If they were watching from the shadows of the house, Hennigan with the gun in hand, waiting for him to get out —

That thought froze him in his seat. He could not measure time; very slowly he counted to a hundred before opening the car door and stepping through. No shot came; no one shouted at him. In a moment he was protected by the hedge, trembling in the darkness there. It seemed incredible that now he was safe. All he had to do was run. A mile and a half back they had passed another house, with lights in its windows. Once he reached that, and got to a phone —

His legs were so shaky that when he stepped out from the hedge he almost fell. But his mind had a clarity of its own, distinct from the fear; it told him that the Courtney boy was inside this house, and that they'd gone to get him. They had the money now, and they'd return him; perhaps they'd leave the boy with him.

Something about that thought made George Madden stop in the road, just past the end of the hedge. Only two people had seen Barlow and Hennigan; only two people could connect them with this. Those two people were George Madden and the boy. If they were silenced, the job was clean, the job was perfect. Barlow was smart; wouldn't Barlow see that?

Panting, George Madden trotted a few steps. Then he stopped again, for there were steps on the gravel road behind him. Blindly, before he thought, George Madden moved for the only shelter he saw — the shadow of the hedge. He was crouched behind it when they reached the car. In the silence he heard Barlow stop and swear; and then Hennigan's sleepy voice, with something snarling and vicious in it now.

"A sucker," he said. "You were sure he was a sucker. Who takes the rap now? It could have been a clean job, easy and nice, with no holes. But you —"

"Look for him, damn you," Barlow said. "He can't be far off. If he stuck to the road —"

"Sure," Hennigan said. "Sure. He'll stick to the road. When he hears us coming he'll stand up and wave." He cleared his throat and spat. Behind the hedge George Madden felt his heart beat in great bounds that seemed to choke his breathing.

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"Damn you," Barlow repeated again. He ran a few feet, and stopped at the other side of the hedge, so close that George Madden could hear him breathing. "Maybe we should have knocked him and the kid off in the house, after we've been messing around in it for a week. We left prints *some* place. As soon as they'd found him and the kid they'd have gone over the dump with a glass to get them — every inch. We might as well have left our names." He swore again, and ran back.

"Come on," he said. "Get in. Let's get the hell out of here."

Another voice spoke then — a young and very scornful voice.

"I'll remember you," it said. "I'll not forget your faces. They'll catch you in the end, and they'll call me, and I'll —"

"You'll what, sonny boy?" Hennigan said softly. "Maybe you won't tell them anything. Maybe you won't be able to."

"Come on," Barlow said. His voice broke slightly. "Are you —"

"I'm running this now," Hennigan said. "I should have run it before, you yellow punk. Your pal was a dope who didn't know what he was doing; it was okay to leave him here, wasn't it? And you had to deliver the kid. You were too yellow to play it the smart way. So what do we do with the kid now? Leave him here?"

There was a silence. After it Hennigan added softly: "Like hell! The kid goes out. He ain't putting the finger on us. Not if I know it."

"Listen, Joey," Barlow said. His voice was pleading, shaky. "That won't do any good now. This Madden —"

Hennigan said: "Maybe when Madden reads about the kid in the morning papers he'll forget what we looked like. You thought of that? He's as yellow as you. A guy like that with a scare in him forgets things or makes out he forgets things. See that, stupid?"

The boy, George Madden thought — they'd kill the boy now. It was the first time he had really thought of the boy at all. As soon as he took shape in his mind George Madden hated him, and tried to get rid of him. He couldn't. He looked stupidly around in the darkness of the hedge. In the city, a few miles away, there were millions of people, and suddenly now he had the queerest feeling that all those people were watching him. The dark road, the big old house behind him, the car and the two men and the boy and himself — they were far away from those millions, cut off from them, in the little world of their own.

In that world, with all those silent millions watching him, invisible and motionless, George Madden saw that he stood for something he had never understood or even thought of before. They were going to take the boy and kill him somewhere; and no one knew, no one could help him. No one but George Madden, who had to think of Georgie and Emma, and the job he had lost. He was safe now; all he had

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to do was keep still. They were getting in the car. In a moment they'd be gone.

It was the longest moment of George Madden's life. He hated the boy, and hated himself. The boy was rich; he wasn't like Georgie. His father wasn't like George Madden. He had money and ease and security.

He'd keep quiet, George Madden thought. He'd let them go. Two kinds of people — rich and poor. Life was hard; you took your chance. You won or lost. What could he do, even if he went back? Nothing — nothing. Why did he even think about going back? He wouldn't — he knew he wouldn't. The starter groaned and he crouched there, with a picture of the boy and dull-eyed Hennigan clear before him, and the fear of death as cold as ice in his breast. Then the starter ground again, the motor caught — and George Madden got up and walked into the road in the glare of the headlights.

"Hey!" he said. "You weren't leaving me here? I went up the road for a walk; I thought you'd be longer."

He got in, grinning at them, not hearing what they said, not noticing how they looked. There was only a fleeting time to think of Emma and Georgie and what a fool he was. But Courtney's boy was Georgie's age — twelve. Even if he was rich, even if his father was the kind of man George Madden hated — he was only twelve.

"Brother," little Hennigan said, "we wouldn't leave you here. Not us. Not for the world."

He was in the back seat with the boy. George Madden had a flashing glimpse of them as the car started off. They went on; nothing happened, though in the dim glow of the dashboard lights Barlow's face was shiny with perspiration.

When he looked at that face something came to George Madden — a strange kind of dignity, outside the fear and coldness in his heart, not quite as strong as those things perhaps, but there, and solid. Hennigan would wait until they were a distance from the house — for he wouldn't want the police to know about the house, and find the prints there. But somewhere, in the next five or ten miles, in a quiet spot — there was nothing he could do. So he was done now.

It was strange to think that he'd never see young Georgie again. He'd always been a fat kid, cute and chubby; he did the craziest things. One Sunday, when he'd just been beginning to crawl and grab things, they'd had him out in the old jalopy and he —

They were at the Parkway crossing when George Madden thought of what he'd done then. On the corner across from them a state trooper stood by his motorcycle, and when he saw them George Madden stiffened slightly. The boy saw him too; he started to call, and then Hennigan had a hand around his face, and in the other hand Hennigan had a gun.

The trooper had not heard the boy. His back was to them and he did not

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turn. Then the lights changed and they began to move, and for a moment Hennigan and the boy, and the thing Georgie had done many years ago were all separate and distinct in George Madden's mind. The fear, too — but he'd almost forgotten that, though he knew it was there. Which of those things was strongest?

George Madden did not know. Only when Barlow had the car in gear — only then, as George Madden leaned forward suddenly, twitched the ignition key and pulled it from the lock as Georgie had done a long time ago, and flung it through the open window to the feet of the state trooper, was it settled for him.

The car went ahead a few feet, on its momentum. Then it bucked crazily, stopping in the center of the road, and the trooper bent down to pick up the key and then came toward them.

In the back seat Hennigan had the door open. He fired as George Madden turned around. The one report seemed to shake the car like an earthquake; and then George Madden realized it wasn't the report that had shaken them; despite the sudden burning agony in his shoulder as he dove for Hennigan he had an instant's vision of the car that had roared up behind them to make the changing light, and had smashed into their rear just as Hennigan fired.

Hennigan was tumbling backward to the road as George Madden grabbed him. Another door opened somewhere — Barlow, George Madden thought. But he wasn't worried about him; the trooper was on that side. All he did was hold Hennigan against the door frame, his wrists outspread, until there were other men around, the trooper taking Hennigan out of his hands, the trooper peering into George Madden's face, saying, "Hey! You've been shot, buddy!"

They patched him up in a back room at the troopers' barracks. Even while they were doing that there were reporters and questions, and flashlight pictures, and Henry R. Courtney shaking his hand, and saying if there was anything he could do for him —

George Madden said there was nothing. Monday, maybe, Sturgis & Klein would call him back; if they didn't, something would come up. He was very sure of that, and he wanted Henry R. Courtney to know he hadn't helped his boy for anything he might get out of it.

He didn't say that, of course; it would have sounded silly. Maybe it was silly. Those millions of people watching him back there.

He knew he wasn't any hero. He was just someone who had found out that if there were two kinds of men they weren't the rich and the poor. They could be, instead, the ones like Barlow and Hennigan, and the countless others who shared enough in their hearts to stand together against them.

And once it was there before you, George Madden thought, once you really saw what it was, nothing could make you change sides.

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*Lord Dunsany in a typical Dunsanyan mood . . . The tale of an "impossible crime" — but is it really "impossible"? In this atomic age? We wonder . . . The author once summed up his philosophy of life in just seven words: "The wolf is always at the door." But sometimes the wolf appears in strange guise — in sheep's clothing, or even masquerading as a machine with ten arms and ten flexible steel hands . . .*

# 10. THE NEW MASTER

*by LORD DUNSANY*

I CANNOT PROVE MY CASE. I HAVE BEEN over everything very carefully; I have had a talk with a lawyer about evidence in coroner's courts, without letting him know what I was really after; and after long consideration I have decided to give no evidence at all, or as little as I can. This will mean that my friend Allaby Methick will be found to have taken his own life, and no doubt they will say that his mind was temporarily deranged. If they do call me I shall do all I can to imply that he suffered from undue mental stress. That is all I can do for him. I know that I shall be sworn to tell the whole truth. But what is the use of that if no one will listen? And I might even be considered deranged myself.

The whole truth is this. Allaby Methick and I belonged to the Otbury Chess Club. It is not a chess club that anyone ever heard of more than ten miles away — knowledge of the hamlet of Otbury would go little farther than that. We used to play often on summer evenings, sitting down in the Otbury schoolroom (which the chess club hired for its use) when the blackbirds were going to sleep, and playing on till the nightingales in briary thickets at the top of the down were all in full song. Methick lived about a mile on one side of Otbury, and I only a little more than that on the other. Except on the rarest occasions, I used to beat Methick. But that never deterred him from coming to have a game with me whenever I asked him to; and the cheerful resignation with which he lost never varied. There were not many other members of the Otbury Chess Club who ever turned up, so Methick and I played a great deal together. And then one evening, as I entered the little schoolroom and found Methick already there, instead of sitting down on a bench at the long table before a board with the pieces already set up, he broke out with the words: "I have something that will beat you."

"A problem, you mean?" I said.

"No," he said. "Come and see. It's



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at my house. We can have supper there."

Almost before I answered, he was striding out of the schoolroom, not literally dragging me with him, but somehow the result was the same.

"What is it?" I asked, as he walked by a sheep track over the downs. Methick was too excited to explain the thing very thoroughly; but at any rate he made it clear that it was a machine of some sort.

He lived alone in this little house of his, except for a charwoman who came in every day and who helped in the kitchen; but he did most of his own cooking. He had some invested capital; but something had made him decide that it was better not to keep capital frozen, so he spent some of it every year on his simple needs, and, finding that he had £1000 to spare, he decided to spend it on chess, for the good reason that chess was what he enjoyed most. "But how on earth," I broke in, "can you spend £1000 on chess?"

"A machine," he said.

"A machine?" I repeated.

"Yes," he said. "It can play chess."

"A *machine?*" I said again.

"Yes," he said. "Haven't you heard?"

And then I remembered that there once was a machine — before the turn of the century, wasn't it? — that was said to have been able to play chess, and I mentioned this to Methick.

"Oh, that," he said. "That was a very simple affair. My machine can beat you."

"I should like to see it," I said.

"I'll show it to you," said Methick.

"Does it know the regular openings?" I asked.

"No," he said. "It plays queer openings."

"I hardly think it will beat me," I said, "if it doesn't know the standard openings."

"It will," he said. "Its openings are much better than ours."

Of course that seemed to me nonsense, and I said little more. There was no need to argue with him, I thought; for the game itself would prove my point more clearly than I could say it. And chess players seldom argue, you know — just as heavyweight boxers do not slap each other's face when they chance to meet. The ring waits to test them.

We went through Methick's small garden and into his house, and there in his sitting-room was a strange machine. At first I thought it was a very fine radio or television set; and then I remembered what I had been brought to see. Long arms of flexible steel lay folded in pairs in front of it. I could see it might require two arms for castling, but I could not see what need it would have for more. I asked Methick. "It is simpler," he explained. "They cover all parts of the board, and one of them is for removing captured pieces."

But I soon lost interest in the steel hands and turned in wonder to that astonishing iron brain, which answered every move and made calculations that I soon saw were beyond me.

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For Methick put me at once in a chair at the table whose top was a chessboard with squares of boxwood and ebony; each square in the board had a small hole into which fitted a metallic stud at the bottom of each chess piece; but what arrangement of wires was underneath the squares, I had, and still have, no idea. The vast brain before me was hidden, as human brains are hidden, though instead of skull and skin, it was walnut that concealed it from the eye. But to the ear it was plain enough that there was something intricate there, for the moment I made a move a faint humming arose, as though innumerable wires were singing to themselves; and often, as I made a move, their tone would suddenly change, so that I knew I was faced by some active and vital thing that was actually thinking. I wanted to look into its face, but the polished walnut prevented any glimpse of that. It felt queer to sit opposite an active and powerful intelligence without ever being able to see its eyes or its face, or anything but a smooth panel of walnut. It felt even queerer not to be able to get some insight into its character — as you are able to do sometimes with human beings — from its long and delicate hands.

There were ten of them at the ends of the long athletic arms, hands no wider than silver forks but very flexible. With these it moved its pieces, or grabbed those it captured. For the benefit of chess players I may say that I opened with the king's gambit, and the machine responded with something like the Cunningham defense, but it wandered away into variations that I had never seen or read about. Every move of mine produced an answering change in the tune the machine was humming — if you can call it a tune — and Black's move came so quickly that, whatever process of thought there was among all those wires, it must have been instantaneous: not like the slower process of our reasoning, but something like our instinct. I learned from that first game something new in the intricacies of the Cunningham gambit; but I learned something else — something even beyond the wisdom of that machine: I learned of its petulance and bad manners. For as the machine began to win, which it did after half an hour, it began to slam down its pieces; I scarcely noticed it at first, so absurd it seemed, but soon it was unmistakable that the machine was frivolously exhibiting a silly and ostentatious triumph. So this was what Allaby Methick had in his house: a mind greater than Man's — at any rate, greater than mine — but a tawdry and vulgar mind. And the thought suddenly came to me: if it behaves like that when winning, what would it do if it lost?

Then Methick played the monster (or whatever you care to call it) with the hospitable intention of putting me at my ease by letting me see that I was not the only person to be beaten by a machine. It soon beat Methick, slamming its pieces down at the end

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with an even more vulgar display of its sensitive flexible arms than it had shown to me, and humming in a contented way that suggested an absurd self-satisfaction. Methick opened a cupboard then and brought out a decanter and two tumblers, and we both had some Irish whiskey.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he asked in a glowing voice; and I praised his wonderful machine as well as I could. But Methick sensed that my praise, which ought to have come so easily, was being held back. In the end he got it out of me: the intellect of the thing was amazing, but what of its character?

"Character?" said Methick.

"Yes," I said. "Do you like having it in the house?"

He got my point then. "Yes," he said, "it's showy and vulgar, but I don't mind that. It's the intellect I got it for."

"Yes," I said. "Yes, of course. But sooner or later doesn't one come up against the other thing, if it's there?"

"Its vulgarity, you mean?" said Methick.

"Exactly," I said.

"Oh, I don't think so," said Methick. "I am interested only in its intellect."

I didn't say any more. You don't decry a treasure that your host shows you, especially when you have seen nothing like it before and are not likely ever to be able to afford such a thing yourself. So I said no more about it. But now I wish I had.

I went home soon after that second game, pondering as I walked along the slope of the downs. On those downs were often found some of the earliest of the crude axe-heads with which Man had slowly won his victory over the beasts, until aided by grimmer weapons he had obtained dominion over the world, which he had held for what seems to us a long time. Now something was loose that was mightier than Man. I saw that machines were already becoming the masters, taking from Man his dominion over the earth. Wherever I looked I saw clear signs of it. It was no consolation to reflect that Man himself had made the machine. Its origin did not matter — only that it was mightier than its creator. Labor-saving devices have been ousting men from employment for the past 50 years, and influencing their ideas, until there is scarcely a house in the civilized world that has no fancies in the permanent form of metal — fancies no longer of Man, but of the Machine. And now, to reveal what I had long suspected, this chess-playing machine, for all its vulgarity, was a power superior to us. Had we had our day, I wondered? The megatherium, the mammoth, and all the great lizards had had theirs. Was Man's turn coming, too?

When I reached home I forgot these gloomy thoughts, but they remained at the back of my mind. And when a day or two later I went over to Otbury again, and saw Methick at the chess club at our usual hour, they all awoke and troubled me once more.

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Something of these gloomy fears I almost conveyed to Methick; but, whether he listened or not, he was too preoccupied with the wonder of his mechanical thinker to appreciate what I was trying to indicate. "The machine," he said, "is playing an entirely new opening. Of course it is too good for me, but it ought to be shown to the masters. I don't believe anything like it has ever been played."

"Yes," I said. "But don't you think it is a pity to let something like that get too clever for us?"

"I think the masters ought to see it," he said.

I saw then that we were on different sides. He wanted to show what his wonderful machine could do. I wanted to see Man hold his place, a place that no machine should be able to usurp. It was no use to say any more. We had both lost interest now in playing each other, but Methick asked me to come to his house again, and this I gladly did, for the more uneasy I became, the more I wanted to see how far the machine had got. I had always felt we could hold our own against everything but thinking, but now this machine was a deeper thinker than we. There was no doubt of it. There is nothing I know in the world that is a surer test of sheer intellect than the chess-board. Here men argue, and how often one finds that none of them can express what he really means. At strategy, which so closely resembles chess, men have made resounding names for themselves, but the purity of that art is too often spotted and flawed by chance; while strategy is the test of power, it does not quite equal chess as a test of the intellect. So as I walked in silence beside Allaby Methick, over the mint and thyme of the downs, I was even more deeply a prey to these fears.

When we got to Methick's little house and went into the sitting-room, there was the monster, concealed by its walnut panels, sitting before the chess table. On the table was a strip of paper such as chess players use to record a game, and two sharp pencils and a knife that had lately been used to sharpen them, with the blade still open and pencil marks on the blade. The steel hands of the machine were folded and idle.

"Look here," I said to Methick. "I don't want to interfere — but do you quite trust that machine?"

"Why not? he asked.

"It's cleverer than we are," I said.

"Oh, yes," he said, taking an obvious pride in it.

"Well," I said, "supposing it should get jealous."

"Jealous?" said Methick.

"Yes," I said. "There are two kinds of jealousy. One is wholly despicable, resenting all superiority. People suffering from that kind would hate an archbishop for his sanctity. But there is another kind with which it might be easier to sympathize — the kind that does not like inferiority, and cannot tolerate it when it is in power. Suppose the machine should ever feel that way. Look at all we have got;

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and it has nothing. Look at all we can do; and it can only sit there and play chess when you put out the pieces. A mind like that, compelled to play second fiddle! Do you think it would like it?"

"I suppose not," said Methick.

"Then why leave that knife where it can reach it?" I said.

Methick said nothing, but he removed the knife. I couldn't say any more, because I saw that Methick did not like my interference. So I sat and watched him play, man against machine, and saw Man being beaten. Again I saw that vulgar display of unseemly triumph, and once more I wondered what the machine would do if it lost.

"Would you care to play?" asked Methick. I said I would, and sat down and played against the monster. I took no interest in its opening, or in any of its play as such; but I watched its speed, its forestalling of all my plans, and its easy victory. Methick must have seen that I was annoyed with his pet, and may have thought that it was because I had been beaten. Whatever his reason, he put the chessmen away and placed a portable radio on the table and turned it on. We got some gentle music that Beethoven had written for a lady named Elise, which was a very pleasant change from the noisy exultations of the triumphant machine. I saw from the way Methick had handled the radio, almost from the way he looked at it, that music was now a secondary interest in his life. Chess was the first, and his grim machine gave that to him; next was the concert halls of the world, to which his little portable radio was a doorway.

When the music was over he opened the back of the radio and took out from it what is called a wet battery — a rectangular glass jar full of a dark-green liquid — and looked at it with the care that a hunting man will give to his horse's food. Like many a man living alone, he used only one table for everything, and he tended the needs of his radio on the same table on which he played chess with the monster. He always drank coffee while playing, and his cup rested on the unoccupied corner nearest him.

Cheered by the music that Methick had so thoughtfully turned on, I said good night and walked home in the calm of an evening that was glowing with early stars. I will not say that I do not mind being beaten at chess, for there is nobody who does not really mind. But I will say that my defeats at chess were not the principal reason for my reluctance to visit Methick again; the principal reason was my dislike of sitting in front of something that was gloating all the time over its intellectual superiority, and which, as soon as the course of the game made that superiority evident, manifested its insolent delight as offensively as it could. If Methick was willing to put up with it, let him; but for myself, I kept away. I had other interests, of course, besides chess and music and Methick. I am married. But my wife is not interested

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in chess, and I doubted being able to tell her about that machine in such a way that she'd have believed me.

Nearly every evening, at the time that I used to play chess with Methick at Otbury, I would think of him. But I felt sure that he would not come to our little chess club any more, that he would be playing with his machine. At sunset I would especially think of him, finding in that ominous look that sometimes comes over the hills as the sun goes down a certain harmony with the feelings I had about Methick. One day, as the sun was setting, I said to my wife:

"I must go over and see Methick."

She said, "You have not been playing chess with him lately."

I said, "No. That is why I must go."

So I walked over the slope of the downs, as moths were sailing abroad, and came to Methick's gate. I walked through his garden, found his door ajar, and went in. And there was Methick at the table — but he was not playing chess. His portable radio was on the boxwood and ebony squares, with the jar of green acid near it, and Methick was doing something or other to the radio's works.

"Not playing chess?" I asked.

"No," he answered. "The B.B.C. are doing the whole of Beethoven's concertos. It's the Emperor tonight. I can't miss that. I can play chess any time."

"Look here," I said. "You don't imagine that machine of yours could ever be jealous of the time you devote to your wireless set."

"Jealous?" he said.

"I've seen a dog jealous of a cat," I replied. "And a dog is nothing, intellectually, compared to that machine. It's got a nasty sort of a character, you know."

"There you go again," said Methick. "It's a wonderful machine. It cost me all that money, and you practically tell me I've wasted it. And why? Because it beat you at chess."

"No, it isn't that," I said.

"Why, then?" he asked.

I couldn't explain. Perhaps I ought to have. But it wouldn't have been easy.

"Have another game with it," Methick suggested, more to stop me from arguing with him than for any other reason.

"No, thanks," I said. "You have a game with it."

And he did. I lifted the radio off the table, but neither of us troubled to move the battery. Methick set up the chess pieces and sat down, his usual cup of coffee next to him. He made the first move, which set everything in motion, and the machine answered. And then I witnessed a most astonishing thing: The monster, that brilliant intellect, that master chess player, began making silly moves. Its first move, which I record for the benefit of chess players, was Pawn to Queen's Rook's fourth, and its second was Pawn to King's Rook's fourth. The machine had evidently lost its temper. It was sulking. After those first two petulant moves, it settled down to play properly, and a very

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interesting game resulted; but the machine did not seem to play with its usual speed. Methick won. How it happened I never quite knew. It is not easy at chess, no matter how good one is, to recover from two bad moves; yet I think the machine did. The solution to the mystery — how a master mind could be beaten by a poor player — was suddenly revealed to me when Methick exclaimed, just as he won, "I forgot to oil it!"

I was the last man who saw Methick alive, and so I must attend the inquest. He died of poison. Sulphuric acid, which he drank with his coffee. There is no doubt of that. Is it any use my telling this story in court? Will the coroner or his jury believe that one machine could be jealous of another machine, and angry at not having been given its due ration of oil?

Will they believe that one of those steel arms reached out while Methick was not looking, picked up the jar of acid, and quietly tipped some into his coffee?

I think not. Nobody would believe that.

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AB: *Anthony Boucher in the New York Times*

FC: *Frances Crane in the Evansville Press*

SC: *Sergeant Cuff in The Saturday Review*

DD: *Drexel Drake in the Chicago Tribune*

H-M: *Brett Halliday and Helen McCloy in the Fairfield County Fair*

DBH: *Dorothy B. Hughes in the Albuquerque Tribune*

LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in the San Francisco Chronicle*

FP: *Fay Profilet in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

EW: *Elizabeth Watt in the Boston Globe*



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*The title of Craig Rice's new short story about the little legal-beagle, the unquenchable John J. Malone, derives from "Endymion" in which Keats wrote:*

> *. . . No, no, I'm sure,*
> *My restless spirit never could endure*
> *To brood so long upon one luxury,*
> *Unless it did, though fearfully, espy*
> *A hope beyond the shadow of a dream.*

*If murder be interpreted as a "luxury," the quotation increaseth in meaning . . . We think you will agree that this new story about Malone is the best Craig Rice has written since "His Heart Could Break" — indeed, it might be the finest Malone short that Craig Rice has ever committed to paper. Judge for yourself.*

## 6. BEYOND THE SHADOW OF A DREAM

*by CRAIG RICE*

"I KNOW A LOT OF LAWYERS WHO could use a good psychiatrist," John J. Malone said, "but this is the first time I know of a psychiatrist needing a good lawyer."

Dr. Martin A. Martin said, "That's very funny, Malone." He didn't laugh. "But you have needed me a few times at that." His handsome face managed to crack itself into something faintly resembling a smile. "The Gifford case, for instance."

"You handled the Gifford case very nicely," Malone conceded, "and I defended him very brilliantly, if I may say so. Though both of us know that the guy was as sane as a hoot owl." That didn't sound right, so he tried it again. "The guy was as hoot as a sane owl." He tried a few more variations, then gave up. He started to say, "Of course, you're a terrific ham in front of a jury," but he caught himself just in time. After all, it was Dr. Martin A. Martin who was paying for the drinks at Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar.

"But this situation isn't funny," the doctor said. He noticed the condition of Malone's glass and waved at the bartender. "I need advice, and I need help."

"If it's a traffic ticket," Malone said, "or —"

"It's murder," Dr. Martin A. Martin said. "*My* murder."

The drinks arrived. Malone picked them up and said to Joe the Angel,



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"My friend and I have things to discuss in the backroom. Bring us two more of these in about five minutes — and leave out the water."

A minute later he slid into a booth in the backroom and looked at his new client: Dr. Martin Alexander Martin, tall and athletic, dark hair graying at the temples, right now a little pale under his healthy tan.

"Who do you plan to murder?" the little lawyer asked cheerfully. "Anyone I know?"

"It's a difficult situation," the doctor said.

"Murder often is," Malone said. "Go on."

"I have a patient. I can't tell you who he is —" the famous psychiatrist paused, drew a quick breath and went on, "Oh, hell, Malone, you'll nose around and find out anyway. It's John Evarts."

Malone said, "Well?" This was no time to make comments. Evidently Dr. Martin A. Martin's clients were in the millionaire class these days. He wondered how much he could decently ask for giving a little free advice.

"Not long ago, Evarts came to me," the doctor went on. "I knew him — as a friend, not as a patient. Been at his home a number of times. He came to me because he'd been dreaming."

"Most people do," Malone said. "Dream, I mean."

"He's going to murder *me*." Dr. Martin A. Martin said.

Joe the Angel arrived just then with two pairs of straight shots and a lone glass of water which he set in the exact center of the table.

The psychiatrist gulped one drink and said, "He's been dreaming of having committed horrible — indescribable — crimes. Of waking in the morning, feeling exhausted, as though he hadn't slept."

"If he's building up an insanity defense in advance," Malone said, "in case he wants to murder his wife or one of his rich uncles, I'd say he was on the right track."

Dr. Martin A. Martin chased his second drink by lighting a cigarette and saying, "But the thing is, he *has* committed murders." He reached for the check with one hand and his wallet with the other. "If you can spare a few minutes, I'd like you to look at the notes in my office."

Malone downed both his drinks and said, "Fine."

Dr. Martin's office, on Lake Shore Drive, was exactly what Malone had imagined: an elevator boy with West Point manners; a waiting room in dove gray, with comfortable chairs, conveniently placed ashtrays, the latest in light fiction on modernistic tables, and a receptionist whose dress matched the pale gray carpet, whose long sleek hair matched the maple furniture, and whose eyes said she would match pennies with anybody.

"Why, Mr. Malone!" she said. "How nice to see you again!"

Malone blinked and tried to remember.

Dr. Martin laughed mirthlessly and said, "Miss Adams never forgets a

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face or a name. She took notes for me at the trial of Alswell McJackson, whom you defended so brilliantly."

"With your help," Malone said modestly.

"Miss Adams," the doctor said, opening a door, "I have gone for the day."

Dr. Martin A. Martin's private office made the reception room look like a broken-down hut in the slums of Old Delhi. It was subdued, restful, and as expensive as a second mortgage on the Hope diamond. Malone repressed an impulse to lie down on the two-inch-thick pale-green rug and confess to everything from the Custer Massacre to the kidnaping of Charley Ross.

"No one, not even Miss Adams, has ever seen these notes," Dr. Martin A. Martin said. His crisp professional tone suddenly made the room seem like any other doctor's office, anywhere. "Mr. Evarts consulted me for the first time on April 13. At that time his dream did not seem to have any significance. However —"

He opened a folder and began to read aloud. "Dated, April 13. 'I dreamed that I rose from bed, dressed myself, left the house and took an El train to the south side. I entered an apartment about half a block from 63rd street. The apartment was locked, but I broke open the door. There was a horrible old woman lying on the bed. I cut her throat with a knife I found in her kitchen. I ransacked the apartment, but found nothing of value. Then in an excess of rage, I set fire to the apartment and fled. The dream ended there but I woke in my own bed, sweating and exhausted.' "

The doctor put the folder down and said, "Dreams of that type are not uncommon. And I was not surprised at John Evarts consulting me so privately — without any notes being taken except my own, which I made rather hastily after he left." He looked up. "The notes are mine, but the story is his. He told me his dream on April 13th. His dream had taken place the night before — April 12th. I found this in the newspaper, quite by accident."

The clipping he handed Malone was dated April 13. It told of the brutal murder of an old woman. Malone felt a small chill run up and down his back. The body of an old woman had been found in the ruins of her ransacked and half-burned tenement apartment. Her throat had been cut with a knife from her own kitchen.

"Of course it could have been mere coincidence," the doctor said. "But later he had another dream. In that one he broke into the kitchenette apartment of a young woman in the Wilson Avenue district, stabbed her with a paring knife he found beside the kitchen sink, slashed at her dying body savagely, and, again, fled."

Malone reached out his hand for the clipping that told of the brutal stabbing and mutilation of a young stenographer.

"He dreamed it," Dr. Martin A. Martin said, "on May 7th."

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The clipping was dated May 8th. The story it told was not pretty.

"There are two others," the doctor went on, "pretty much along the same line. A dream of a girl picked up at a bar, stabbed with a nail file that she carried in her purse. That dream was the night of June 2nd." He handed over another clipping, dated June 3rd. "And another dream of a — well, you'd better read it for yourself. He dreamed about it on the night of June 25th; it actually happened that night, just before midnight."

Malone read the fourth clipping, then pushed it aside and waited.

"Now," Dr. Martin A. Martin said, "he's going to murder *me*."

Malone said, "You don't want a lawyer, you want a bodyguard." It seemed to him that his voice sounded a little hoarse and shrill. He tried to laugh, and failed.

The psychiatrist didn't seem to notice. He shoved the notes in his desk drawer and continued: "Last night he dreamed that he came here, late at night. He dreamed that he rang the night bell, and I admitted him. You see, this is not only my office but my home. I have a bedroom, a bath, and a kitchen beyond this office, but the only entrance is through the reception room."

"Go on," Malone said.

"He dreamed that we came into the consulting room, where we are now. I sat down behind my desk. Suddenly he lunged at me across the desk, and stabbed me with a knife taken from my own kitchen."

There was a little silence. The pleasant room seemed unpleasantly cold.

"Did you live?" Malone inquired, very casually.

"No," the doctor said, just as casually. He rose and asked quietly, "Would you like a drink?"

"You're damned right I would," Malone said. He watched Dr. Martin A. Martin walk through the door that led to the kitchen. Then he closed his eyes and tried to imagine John Evarts, millionaire sportsman, in this same room, telling his frightening story. He tried to imagine how Dr. Martin A. Martin's bedroom was decorated, judging from the reception room and consultation room, opened his eyes fast, and hoped a blush didn't show on his face.

"Thanks," he said, accepting a glass. "Now, what kind of advice do you want? Move away, buy a gun, or call the cops?"

"I may be foolish," the doctor said, "but I've already bought a gun. I don't want to move away. And since it *is* John Evarts, I don't think I ought to discuss this with the police."

"Having taken your own advice," Malone told him, "what the hell did you call me for?"

Dr. Martin A. Martin laughed slightly and said, "I thought you might like to hear an interesting story, and have a drink with me." He refilled Malone's glass.

"Nice of you," Malone said. "But since you expect to be murdered any hour now, you'd better make out a

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check for my consultation fee. Beyond that, any advice I give you is strictly on the house."

Dr. Martin grinned and pushed a button on his desk. A lovely voice from the box said, "Yes —?"

"Make out a check to John J. Malone for legal services," the doctor said. "Make it for five hundred dollars, and mail it to his office."

Malone wanted to say he'd be glad to take it with him and save the doctor the price of a stamp; but he changed his mind and said nothing.

The doctor smiled wryly at him and said, "If I'm still alive tomorrow, I'll stop payment on the check."

On his way back to the office, Malone paused at Joe the Angel's. There were a few things he wanted to think about. At the top of the list was the luscious and long-eyelashed Miss Adams. There surely must be some way of making a date with her. Next to the top was the matter of the man who dreamed he was a murderer.

After two ryes and a little meditation, he told Joe the Angel the story, translating it into something that had happened to a friend of his while vacationing in Haiti. Joe listened, and told Malone of a similar occurrence that had been told to him by his aunt from the old country. A Hungarian janitor from the City Hall, attracted by the conversation, bought a round of beers and told the sad story of what had once happened to the nephew of his second cousin. By that time a reporter from the *Tribune* horned in with, "Say, let me tell you what happened to a friend of mine while he was driving past a cemetery in Nebraska —"

Malone decided it was time to go back to his office.

"There'll be a check for five hundred dollars in the mail tomorrow morning," he told Maggie. "So see if you can cash a check for a hundred bucks at the liquor store on Washington Street. If they won't do it, try that bookie over on Clark. And pay yourself some back salary. But when that check comes in, get it into the bank *fast*."

"Why?" Maggie asked, reaching for her hat. "Is the guy going to change his mind?"

Malone said, "No, but I doubt if he'll live till morning. Wear your coat, it's colder than an old maid's elbow outside."

Maggie put on her coat. "The rent is due," she said reproachfully, "but you need a hundred dollars. Cash, that is."

"I think I have a date," Malone told her, "and don't ask questions."

He went into his private office and sat for a long time, thinking things over. Finally he looked up John Evarts' telephone number in his very personal telephone book, dialed, and when a dignified male voice answered, he came back with twice as much dignity and said, "This is Mr. O'Leary's office calling. Mr. O'Leary was to meet Mr. Evarts this evening and has mislaid the address —"

A moment later he wrote down on

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a tattered envelope the fact that John Evarts would be at The Blue Casino sometime after nine.

He thought for another minute, then dialed Dr. Martin A. Martin's number. "Miss Adams? This is Mr. Malone. No, I don't want to talk to Dr. Martin. I want to talk to you. Yes, yes, I do. Why? Because you're a very lovely person, and I really want to know you better. How about dinner tonight?"

After several minutes of coaxing, which he suspected was basically unnecessary, he said, "Wonderful! Now where do I call for you?"

She would have to live in Rogers Park, Malone reflected bitterly as he hung up.

While he dressed and shaved, he considered bringing her an orchid, then gave up the idea. Miss Adams gave him the definite impression that all he needed was a friendly smile and a bag of popcorn. Or perhaps, a square meal and an evening at The Blue Casino. Besides, he reminded himself, it was really only information he was after.

Thinking back, he wondered if she picked out her own clothes. She was "definitely what the well-dressed receptionist should wear." It was certainly smart of Dr. Martin A. Martin to let her skip those starched white uniforms usually seen in doctors' reception rooms. Her soft gray dress with the little pink frill at the throat would either take a patient's mind off his worries, or make him think up some new ones.

When he picked up Miss Adams at the Rogers Park address, he decided that she did choose her own clothes. Dr. Martin A. Martin might have thought of the soft gray dress with the pink frill, but he could never have been responsible for the fur coat that nestled against Malone's shoulder like a lonesome kitten. Malone expected it to purr, any minute. And it did.

"It was so sweet of you to phone me, Mr. Malone."

"It was so sweet of you to answer, Miss Adams." He wondered what she was wearing under the fur coat.

It turned out to be a rose-red strapless affair, exactly the same shade as her lipstick. He decided once and for all that she did pick out her own clothes. Even an eminent psychiatrist like Dr. Martin A. Martin couldn't be that smart.

Then he found himself wondering how she could afford a dress like that on a receptionist's salary.

She smiled at him across the table and cooed, "I made it myself."

Malone blinked. He hoped he wasn't blushing. He said, "So, in addition to all your other talents, you also do mind-reading."

She laughed. "I didn't have to be a mind-reader. I saw you looking very thoughtfully at my dress. Naturally, you were trying to figure out how I could be an honest woman, and still buy a dress like this on the salary I earn. Now you have the answer. Including everything, down to the last spool of thread, it cost nineteen dollars and twelve cents."

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"If I'd met a girl like you twenty years ago," Malone said, "I'd be a rich man today." His eyes narrowed. "I suppose you keep a pair of minks locked up in a cage, and every now and then they provide you with a new fur coat."

"Not only that," she said cheerfully, "but I keep a pair of silver foxes and a pair of chinchillas, in case I get tired of wearing mink." She laughed again. "Mr. Malone, you'd be surprised what you can buy for ten dollars down and ten dollars a week. Any year now, and the coat will be mine."

"Curiously," Malone said, "I have the damnedest notion that you're telling the truth."

Dinner, six drinks, and two dances later, he had learned a number of things. There was only one entrance to Dr. Martin A. Martin's office. She preferred double bacardis to any other drink. Yes, she did have an almost photographic memory. Dr. Martin A. Martin was *wonderful*. All his women patients adored him. Yes, most of his patients were women.

No, Malone told himself, it would take more than a mink coat or a diamond bracelet — unless it *was* a bag of popcorn, or one more bacardi.

"There's one of his patients now," Miss Adams said suddenly.

Malone looked up quickly. John Evarts had just come into The Blue Casino. The little lawyer scowled. Evarts certainly didn't look like a man who needed a psychiatrist. A diet and a good gymnasium, perhaps, but no more.

The millionaire sportsman was a big man, over six feet, heavily built, with fat just beginning to overlay the muscles. His broad, friendly face was pinkish. He looked as though he got a lot of fun out of just being alive.

The woman beside him — Malone blinked, and took a second look.

She looked like a very well bred and very well groomed horse. High-strung as a racing filly, but better controlled. Malone had a feeling that she was brown all over. Her smooth brown hair was beautifully dressed, as sleek as though it had been curried. Her angular face was tanned to just the correct shade. Her dress, too, was brown, obviously expensive, from just the right shop, and just as obviously not from Paris.

Miss Adams muttered something under her breath.

Malone jumped at least an inch. "Someone you know?" he asked politely.

"That woman," Miss Adams said. "Mrs. John Evarts. One of Dr. Martin's patients. I don't know why the doctor puts-up with her. I know it's fashionable to consult Dr. Martin, but she could have had a better excuse than dreaming she was married to a jockey."

The little lawyer hastily choked back half a dozen things he was on the verge of saying. "Is that her husband with her?"

"I hope it is," Miss Adams said. "She — she needs a good psychiatrist like — like I need another bacardi."

"She probably does need a good

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psychiatrist," Malone said gallantly. He waved at the passing waiter.

It was some hours later that he sat on the edge of his bed and debated whether or not it would be simpler to take his clothes off now, or sleep in them and change in the morning. It was a long and serious debate, and just as he had decided to flip a coin, the telephone rang.

He determined not to answer it. Telephones, at this hour of the night, usually meant trouble, and he was tired. But he reached for the receiver — trouble or not, he was curious.

It was Dr. Martin A. Martin. His voice was tense, and he was talking fast.

"He's on his way here, Malone."

"Nonsense," Malone yawned "You'd better see a good psychiatrist." He realized that was the wrong thing to say and added hastily, "You can relax. From the condition Evarts was in when he left The Blue Casino, it'll be twenty-four hours before he can hit the broad side of a barn with a hand axe. Lock the door and go to bed."

"Malone," Dr. Martin said desperately, "*he's at the door!*"

"Shoot him," Malone said wearily.

"Malone. My gun —"

There was a sound Malone couldn't quite identify, and then silence. The little lawyer sat on the edge of his bed for a few minutes, trying to think things over. Finally he told himself that he could sleep anytime, and put in a call for Capt. von Flanagan, of the Homicide Squad.

At last a sleepy and indignant von Flanagan mumbled, "You're drunk."

"That may be," Malone said, "but I know a murder when I hear one. And I can tell you all about this one, so you'd better pick me up in front of my hotel in fifteen minutes."

The car, sirens screeching, actually arrived in slightly over ten minutes. In the back seat, von Flanagan was still tucking his shirt in and adjusting his tie. Malone got in fast, and gave the Lake Shore Drive address. Then he settled back and told von Flanagan the whole story.

"Dr. Martin Martin!" von Flanagan interrupted once. It was a gasp.

"John Evarts!" he interrupted a second time. "Why, the guy must be nuts!"

"That seems to be the general idea," Malone said calmly. He wished he were asleep.

Nobody answered Dr. Martin's bell. Nobody answered repeated poundings on the door. Malone felt a few small chills running up and down his spine, like small mice with cold wet feet.

It took a little time to rouse the janitor to open the door with his passkey. The reception room was dark and empty, but a light showed around the door to the inner office. Von Flanagan pushed the door open, took one quick look, and grabbed the nearest telephone to call his office for everything and everybody that would be needed.

"Don't touch anything," Malone said weakly, forgetting that von Flanagan was head of homicide.

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Before von Flanagan's boys had arrived, he and Malone had determined a few things.

The most important one was that there was no other living person in the apartment with the exception of themselves.

The knife that had cut Dr. Martin A. Martin's throat had come from the little kitchenette back of his office.

The gun in Dr. Martin A. Martin's hand was an Iver Johnson .32. It had recently been fired.

Miss Adams had told the truth; there was only one entrance to the combination office-apartment, and that was through the reception room.

As soon as the first arrivals had taken over their official duties, Malone drew von Flanagan aside.

"They know what to do. We'd better get going."

Von Flanagan growled that this was not time to go out for a drink.

"John Evarts," Malone reminded him. "The doc must of missed with that peashooter of his, and according to the doc's notes, Evarts must have gone home."

The police officer got the idea right away, left a few instructions, and got going. Reporters were already coming into the lobby downstairs.

"I'll have an arrest before morning," von Flanagan promised them.

Somehow Malone wished he hadn't said that.

The police car drew up quietly in front of the building where John Evarts lived. A self-service elevator took them up to the penthouse.

Again, pounding on the door and repeated rings on the bell drew no results. Not for a long time, at least. Finally a voice through the door said, very sleepily,

"Who is it?"

"Police," von Flanagan bellowed.

The door opened an inch, secured on the other side by a bolt and chain. Von Flanagan shoved his credentials through the crack. The bolt and chain rattled and the door opened.

Mrs. Evarts had very obviously been wakened from a sound sleep. Her hair was becomingly mussed, her face naked of make-up. She had put on a deep-rose velvet robe.

"Oh, dear," she said, "I hope Albert — the chauffeur — isn't in trouble again. He does get into trouble on his nights off, but he's a good boy, really." She smothered a yawn and said, "Sorry. Sorry I took so long to answer the door, but I was sound asleep, and it's the maid's night out too."

"I've got to see your husband," von Flanagan said.

She smiled wanly. "You can see him, but I don't think you can talk to him. I poured him into bed when we came home, and I doubt if he'll stir for hours. But you can try."

She led the way down the hall. There was a huge living room whose décor would still be called ultramodern in 1966, and beyond it Malone could glimpse other rooms. There was a wide corridor hung with Oriental prints and which seemed to have doors opening off in all directions. Mrs.

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Evarts paused at one of the doors and knocked.

Von Flanagan had evidently grown tired of knocking on doors and getting no answers. He reached for the knob.

"He's probably sleeping like the dead," Mrs. Evarts said apologetically.

She was almost right. John Evarts wasn't sleeping, but he was dead.

He was curled up in bed, the covers comfortably tucked around him. One arm, in a flamboyant striped pajama sleeve, was outside the covers. The sleeve was made even more colorful by the blood that had run down from the bullet hole in his forehead.

Mrs. Evarts let loose with a well-bred scream.

Malone said hoarsely, "If it turns out that he was shot with an Iver Johnson .32 — and somehow I think it will —"

"I am *not* superstitious," Malone said firmly. "It's that I know how to let well enough alone." He downed his drink in one gulp and waved at Joe the Angel.

"But Malone," von Flanagan said in a plaintive voice, "I promised an arrest before morning."

"It's morning right now," Malone said, "unless you call half-past 5 yesterday." He scowled. "Yesterday. That's what I've been trying to remember. Because of yesterday being tomorrow."

"Malone," Joe the Angel said, leaning on the bar, "go home. You need a good night's sleep."

"Tomorrow," Malone mused, "and by tomorrow it may be yesterday. Give my friend here another drink and charge it to me."

"Tomorrow," Joe the Angel said, "tomorrow you pay the bill." He moved down the bar.

"I'm not superstitious either," Capt. von Flanagan said. "But it's a damned funny thing to think about. Here's this guy, dreams about committing murders. Tells this high-class psychiatrist about it. Turns out, though, the murders *were* committed. Only he never left no fingerprints, he was never seen, and nobody thinks he even left his apartment." He scowled. "How could he have murdered people in his sleep, without ever leaving the place where he was sleeping?"

Joe the Angel shoved two drinks across the bar and said, "Something almost like that happened in the town where my aunt lived in the old country —"

"Go away," von Flanagan said. Absent-mindedly he paid for the drinks. "Then he dreams he killed the doctor. He goes to bed, sound asleep. Maybe he dreams again . . ."

Malone had a notion that small cold mice were now running up and down von Flanagan's back.

"*He* stabs the doctor. The doctor shoots *him*. And the two of them eight blocks away from each other all the time! Who dreamed what? And what kinda report am I going to make?"

The Hungarian janitor from the City Hall moved up and said, "In my country we have a belief that —"

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"Go away," Malone said.

"And," von Flanagan added unhappily, "I promised an arrest by morning."

Malone finished his drink, slid off the stool, and said, "It won't be morning till the sun comes up. Let's go and make the arrest right now."

The sun was on the verge of coming up when they arrived at the apartment. This time the door was opened promptly by a tired-eyed young woman who said, "Well?"

Before von Flanagan could speak, Malone announced, "I thought you ought to know. As a defense lawyer, I've never lost a patient yet. I'll see you after the arrest, and you'd better bring your check book along, so you can give me a retainer."

She stared at him.

Von Flanagan said, "Mrs. Evarts, it is my duty to arrest you on suspicion of the murder of your husband, John Evarts, and the murder of Dr. Martin A. Martin. And I think you'd better take Mr. Malone's advice."

The sun was up and so was Joe the Angel. Von Flanagan growled at him across the double-sized coffee royal he was holding, "Don't you ever go to sleep?"

"Not when my friend Malone don't go to sleep," Joe the Angel said proudly. "Then I stay up all night and wait." He'd already heard the bare outline of what had happened. Mrs. John Evarts had broken down and admitted everything. She had engaged Malone as her attorney and he was already planning an insanity defense — after all, she had been consulting a psychiatrist for months. Malone now had a second five-hundred-dollar check to deposit as soon as the bank opened.

"Malone, you pay the bar bill any time," Joe said happily, "also the twenty dollars you owe me." He added to von Flanagan, "I bet you the twenty dollars he gets her off."

Von Flanagan sighed. "I'd have been in a fine spot if she'd denied everything. Now, Malone, how did you know?"

"Tomorrow and yesterday," Malone said. "Yesterday and tomorrow."

"He's drunk," Joe the Angel said, this time with purely professional pride. "Von Flanagan, you pay attention to what he says."

"To consult the doctor," Malone said, "Evarts would have had to come through the reception room. Yet Miss Adams, who really has a phenomenal memory, didn't recognize him when she saw him at The Blue Casino. She did recognize Mrs. Evarts as one of the many women patients who had fallen in love with her psychiatrist." He took a swallow of the coffee and said, "I will never know why women fall in love with psychiatrists, when they could just as well fall in love with a good lawyer, and for much less money."

"Go *on*," von Flanagan said in a peevish voice.

"Dr. Martin figured out a lovely way of murdering John Evarts, so

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that he could marry Mrs. Evarts and the Evarts millions," Malone continued. "Every time there was a particularly brutal murder, of a particular type, in the newspapers, he would sit down and write a set of notes, presumably the result of an interview with John Evarts. Of course, Evarts never consulted Martin — the doc made it all up, including the dreams. And when he had notes on enough murders, he confided the whole story to me." Malone added, "Of course, I knew right away it was phony."

"How did you know?" demanded von Flanagan.

Malone drew a long breath. "The deal was, Mrs. Evarts was to get her husband up to the doctor's office, late at night. The doctor, after notifying me, was to shoot him. A knife from the doctor's kitchen was to be planted in Evarts's hand. Of course the doctor forgot one item in this set-up, which von Flanagan brilliantly realized at once."

Von Flanagan blinked, said nothing, and waited.

"To get the knife," Malone said, "Evarts would have had to cross the office into the kitchenette, take the knife, and come back — all in plain view of Dr. Martin A. Martin, who was presumably wide-awake and waiting for him, with a gun in his hand and a phone call in for me."

There was a little silence and then von Flanagan said, "Sure, I saw that right away."

"It was perfect for the doc except for one thing," Malone said. "Mrs. Evarts changed her mind. Maybe she decided she could do better than a psychiatrist. A lawyer, for instance. Or maybe she found out the doctor was two-timing her. Or maybe she just wanted all that money for herself." Malone paused. "For the love of Michael, Joe, make some more coffee! I've got to be in court at 10 in the morning, and it's almost 9 now."

"And you need a shave and a bath," Joe said sympathetically; "but talk loud so I can hear too." He moved away.

"I had figured out the set-up," Malone said, "up to the point where Dr. Martin A. Martin called me on the phone. I even knew — I was pretty sure I knew — what he was going to say. But just before the line, and he, both went dead, the doc said, 'Malone. My gun —' And I thought he sounded shocked and surprised."

Joe called from the back room: "Louder, Malone."

"I know now," Malone said, "that he was shocked and surprised because his gun wasn't there in his desk, and because he'd expected a drunken or drugged Evarts to be shoved through the door by his future widow. Instead, he saw Mrs. Evarts, with the previously agreed-upon knife in her hand. He was so shocked and surprised that he dropped the telephone and just sat there. Whereupon she stuck the knife neatly in his throat, stuck the gun with which she'd already killed her husband in the doctor's hand, and went quietly home to bed like a good girl to sleep the peaceful

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sleep of the innocent — until we crude and horrid people banged on the door and waked her up."

"But how did she expect to get away with it?" von Flanagan asked.

"She probably would have," Malone said, "if it hadn't been for —" he caught himself just in time "— you."

Joe came in with fresh coffee, and poured brandy into each cup.

"She probably planned originally to get Evarts into Dr. Martin's office, let the doctor shoot him, managed to stab the doctor, and then let the police decide who did what first," Malone said. "But Evarts spoiled her plan by getting good and drunk. She couldn't very well carry him for eight blocks. So she changed her plan and did it this way."

"But Malone," von Flanagan said, "How did she have the gun?"

"Mrs. Evarts is a smart babe," Malone told him. "She wasn't taking any chances on things going wrong, and she wanted the ammunition to be on her side. She probably got the gun from Dr. Martin's office sometime during the afternoon and carried it around with her, just in case."

After a little silence, von Flanagan asked, "One more thing, Malone. You said you knew right off that the doc's story was a phony?"

"Yesterday and tomorrow," Malone said again, with rising pride. "Dr. Martin's notes — remember, he wrote them himself. According to the doc's notes, Evarts had these dreams of murder, woke up limp as a bar rag, and every time it turned out that the murder had been committed. Each murder and each alleged dream of it took place at the same time. But then he dreamed he was *going* to commit murder; in the doc's case, Evarts dreamed a murder *before* it happened." Malone yawned and waved his cup at Joe the Angel. "If the doc's murder had been real," Malone said fuzzily, "it would have happened like the others — at the time Evarts was dreaming." Malone raised his head suddenly. "Or maybe it's the other way around . . . I'm going home."

It was twenty minutes to 10 when Malone walked into his office, shaved, showered, and put on the neat double-breasted gray suit that he liked best for courtroom wear. His cheeks were pink and his eyes were bright.

Maggie stared at him.

"It's wonderful," Malone said, "what a good night's sleep will do."

"Court," Maggie reminded, still staring. "Ten o'clock."

Malone reached for the brief case she was handing him. With his other hand he tossed the check on her desk.

"Get this through the bank fast," he told her. "Pay yourself some salary, and save me a hundred dollars. I think I have a date tonight." He started toward the door, paused, and pulled out a crumpled envelope with a name and address scrawled on the back.

"And while you're out, I want you to send something to Miss Adams, at this address," he said. "A bag of popcorn — and have it wrapped as a gift."

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*Another story by that "sophisticated teller of tales," that "cunning master of suspense," that "clever caricaturist," that modern purveyor of the macabre, the fantastic, and the bizarre . . . the contemporary chronicler who is in danger of becoming a cult . . . the magician of the short story whose work has been compared with that of Saki, John Collier, Ring Lardner, O. Henry, Poe, Ambrose Bierce, Angus Wilson, A. E. Coppard, and Lord Dunsany . . .*

*Well, the plain and simple truth is, here is one of Roald Dahl's most wicked, outrageous, impudent, exquisite, and risqué tales.*

## II. A CONNOISSEUR'S REVENGE

*by ROALD DAHL*

IT IS NEARLY MIDNIGHT, AND I CAN see that if I don't make a start at writing this story down now, I never shall. My idea — and I believe it was a good one — was to try, by a process of confession and analysis, to discover a reason, or at any rate some justification for my outrageous behavior toward Janet de Pelagia. I wanted essentially to address myself to an imaginary and sympathetic listener, a kind of mythical *you*, someone gentle and understanding to whom I might tell unashamedly every detail of this unfortunate episode. I can only hope that I am not too upset to do so.

If I am to be quite honest with myself, I suppose I shall have to admit that what is disturbing me most is not so much the sense of my own shame, or even the hurt that I have inflicted upon poor Janet; it is the knowledge that I have made a monstrous fool of myself and that all my friends — if I can still call them that — all those warm and lovable people who used to come so often to my house, must now be regarding me as nothing but a vicious, vengeful old man. Yes, that surely hurts. When I say to you that my friends were my whole life, then perhaps you will begin to understand.

Will you? I doubt it — unless I digress for a minute to tell you roughly the sort of person I am.

Well, let me see. Now that I come to think of it, I suppose I am, after all, a type; a rare one, mark you, but nevertheless a quite definite type — the well-to-do, leisurely, middle-aged man of culture, adored (I choose the word carefully) by his many friends for his charm, his money, his air of scholarship, his generosity, his wisdom, and I sincerely hope, for himself also.

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You will find him (this type) only in the big capitals of culture — London, Paris, New York — of that I am certain. The money he has was earned by his dead father whose memory he is inclined to despise. This is not his fault, for there is something in his make-up that compels him secretly to despise all people who have never had the wit to learn the difference between Rockingham and Spode, Waterford and Venetian, Sheraton and Chippendale, Monet and Manet, or even Pommard and Montrachet. He is, therefore, a connoisseur, possessing above all things an exquisite taste.

His Constables, Boningtons, Lautrecs, Renoirs, Vuillards are as fine as anything in the museums; and from the walls on which these wonders hang, there issues a little golden glow of splendor, a subtle emanation of grandeur in which he lives and moves and entertains with a sly nonchalance that is not entirely unpracticed.

He is invariably a bachelor.

You should know me well enough by now to judge me fairly and — dare I hope it? — to sympathize with me when you hear my story. You may even decide that much of the blame for what has happened should be placed not upon me, but upon a lady called Gladys Ponsonby. After all, she was the one who started it.

It was last March, if I remember rightly. I had been dining with the Asshendens in that lovely house of theirs that overlooks the southern fringe of Regent's Park. There were a fair number of people there, but Gladys Ponsonby was the only one, besides myself, who had come alone; so when it was time for us to leave, I naturally offered to see her safely back to her house. She accepted, and we left together in my car; but unfortunately, when we arrived at her place, she insisted that I come in and have "a little nightcap," as she put it. I didn't wish to seem stuffy, so I told the chauffeur to wait and I went in.

Gladys Ponsonby is an unusually short woman, certainly not more than four feet nine or ten, maybe even less than that — one of those tiny persons who gives me, when I am beside her, the comical, rather wobbly feeling that I am standing on a chair. She is a widow, a few years younger than I, maybe fifty-three or -four, and it is possible that thirty years ago she was quite a fetching little thing.

In the living room she gave me a brandy, and we sat together on the sofa for a while discussing the Asshendens' party and the people who were there. "Tell me," she said finally, "what do you think of my new portrait?"

She indicated a large canvas hanging over the fireplace that I had been trying to avoid looking at ever since I entered the room. It was a hideous thing — painted, as I well knew, by a man who was now all the rage in London, a very mediocre painter called John Royden. It was a full-length portrait of Gladys, Lady Ponsonby, painted with a certain technical cunning that made her out to be a tall and quite alluring creature.

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"Charming," I said.

"Isn't it, though! I'm so glad you like it."

"Quite charming."

"I think John Royden is a genius. Don't you think he's a genius, Lionel?"

"Well, that might be going a bit far."

"But everyone's queuing up, simply *queuing up* to get themselves done," Gladys said.

She sat silent for a while, sipping her brandy, and she knew I was watching her. Without turning her head, she glanced at me cautiously out of the corner of her eye. "Lionel, I think I'll tell you a secret," she said.

"Really, Gladys, I simply must get home."

"Don't be frightened, Lionel. I won't embarrass you."

"I'm not very good at secrets."

"I've been thinking," she said, "you're such a great expert on pictures, this ought to interest you." She sat quite still except for her fingers, which were moving and twisting all the time like a bunch of small white snakes wriggling in her lap. "This is probably the best-kept secret in London," she went on, "a woman's secret. I suppose it's known to about — let me see — about thirty or forty women altogether. And not a single man. Except him, of course — John Royden."

I didn't wish to encourage her, so I said nothing.

"But first of all, promise — *promise* you won't tell a soul?"

"Dear me!"

"You *promise*, Lionel?"

"Yes, Gladys, all right, I promise."

"Good! Now listen. I suppose you know John Royden paints only women?"

I admitted I didn't know.

"And they're always full-length portraits, either standing or sitting — like mine there. Now take a good look at it, Lionel. Do you see how beautifully the dress is painted?"

To my surprise, I noticed that the paint of the dress was laid on so heavily it was actually raised out from the rest of the picture.

"I think the best way is to describe what happened the very first time I went along for a sitting," Gladys said.

Oh, what a bore this woman is, I thought, and how can I get away?

"That was about a year ago, and I remember how excited I was to be going in to the studio of the great painter. I dressed myself up in a wonderful new dress I'd just bought, and a special little red hat, and off I went. Mr. Royden met me at the door and of course I was fascinated by him at once. He had a small pointed beard and thrilling blue eyes, and he wore a black velvet jacket. The studio was huge, with red velvet sofas and velvet chairs — he loves velvet — and velvet curtains and even a velvet carpet on the floor. He came right to the point. He told me about how he painted quite differently from other artists. In his opinion, he said, there was only one method of attaining perfection when painting a woman's body and I mustn't be shocked by it.

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" 'I don't think I'll be shocked, Mr. Royden,' I told him.

" 'I'm sure you won't either,' he said. He had the most marvelous white teeth and they sort of shone through his beard when he smiled. 'You see, it's like this,' he went on. 'You examine any painting you like of a woman — I don't care who it's by — and you'll see that although the dress may be well painted, there is an effect of artificiality, of flatness about the whole thing, as though the dress were draped over a log of wood. And you know why?'

" 'No, Mr. Royden, I don't,' I said.

" 'Because the painters themselves didn't really know what was underneath!' "

Gladys Ponsonby paused to take a few more sips of brandy. "Don't look so startled, Lionel," she said to me. "There's nothing wrong about this. Keep quiet and let me finish. So then Mr. Royden said, 'That's why I insist on painting my subjects first of all undraped. And when I've done you like that,' he went on, 'we'll have to wait a few weeks for the paint to dry. Then you come back and I paint on your underclothing. And when that's dry, I paint on the dress.' "

"The man's an absolute bounder!" I exclaimed.

"No, Lionel, no! You're quite wrong. If only you could have heard him, so charming about it all, so genuine and sincere. Anyone could see he really *felt* what he was saying."

"I tell you, Gladys, he's a bounder!"

"Don't be so silly, Lionel. And anyway, let me finish. The first thing I told him was that my husband, who was alive then, would never agree.

" 'Your husband need never know,' he answered. 'Why trouble him? No one knows my secret except the women I've painted.'

"And when I protested a bit more, I remember he said, 'My dear Lady Ponsonby, there's nothing immoral about this. Art is only immoral when practiced by amateurs.' I must say he was very convincing, so after a while I gave in, and that was that. So now, Lionel, my sweet, you know the secret."

"Gladys, is this really true?" I asked.

"Of course, it's true."

"You mean to say that's the way he paints all his subjects?"

"Yes. And the joke is, the husbands never know anything about it. All they see is a nice, fully clothed portrait of their wives. Of course there's nothing wrong with being painted disrobed — artists do it all the time — but our silly husbands have a way of objecting to that sort of thing."

"By gad, the fellow's got a nerve!" I said. I could see it all quite clearly now. This Royden was indeed a bounder, practicing as neat a piece of psychological trickery as I had ever heard of. The man knew only too well that there was a whole set of well-to-do indolent women in the city who got up at noon and spent the rest of the day trying to relieve their boredom with bridge and canasta and shopping, until the cocktail hour came

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along. All they craved was a little excitement, something out of the ordinary, and the more expensive the better. Why, the news of an entertainment like this would spread through their ranks like smallpox. I could just see the great plump Hermione Girdlestone leaning over the canasta table and saying, "But, my dear, it's *simply* fascinating! I can't *tell* how intriguing it is — *much* more fun than going to your doctor."

"You won't tell anyone, Lionel, will you? You promised," Gladys said.

"No, of course not. But now I must go, Gladys, I really must."

"Don't be so silly. I'm just beginning to enjoy myself."

I sat patiently on the sofa. Her little buried eyes were still watching me in that mischievous, canny way. There was the look of serpents in those eyes, something sly and ominous about the way she sat there hunched up on the far side of the sofa, watching me, and I felt certain the woman was hatching out some further unpleasantness, or deviltry or scandal.

Then suddenly, so suddenly that I jumped, she said, "Lionel, what's this I hear about you and Janet de Pelagia?"

"Now Gladys, please —"

"Lionel, you're blushing!"

"Nonsense."

"Don't tell me the old bachelor has really taken a tumble at last?"

"Gladys, this is too absurd." I rose to go, but she put a hand on my knee and stopped me.

"Don't you know by now, Lionel, that there *are* no secrets?"

"Janet is a fine girl."

"You can hardly call her a girl," Gladys Ponsonby said. She paused. "But of course I agree with you, Lionel, she's a wonderful person in every way. Except," and now she spoke very slowly, "except that she *does* say some rather peculiar things occasionally."

"What sort of things?"

"Oh, just things, you know — about people. About you."

"What did she say about me?" I asked.

"Nothing at all, Lionel. It wouldn't interest you."

"Gladys, what did she say?"

While I waited for her to answer I could feel the sweat breaking out all over me.

"Well now, let me see. Of course, she was only joking or I couldn't dream of telling you, but I suppose she *did* say how it was all a wee bit of a bore."

"What was?"

"Oh, going out to dinner with you nearly every night — that kind of thing." Gladys Ponsonby sat up straight. "If you really want to know, she said it was a crashing bore."

"What did she say then?"

"Now look, Lionel, there's no need to get so excited. I'm only telling you this for your own good."

"Then please hurry up and tell it, Gladys," I urged.

"It's just that I happened to be playing canasta with Janet this after-

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noon and I asked her if she was free to dine with me tomorrow. She said no, she wasn't.

"Go on."

"Well, what she actually said was, 'I'm dining with that crashing old bore Lionel Lampson.' "

"What else?"

"Now that's enough. I don't think I should tell the rest."

"Finish it, please!"

"Why, Lionel, don't keep shouting at me like that. Of course I'll tell you if you insist. As a matter of fact, I wouldn't consider myself a true friend if I didn't. Don't you think it's the sign of true friendship when two people like us —"

"Gladys! Please hurry."

"Good heavens, you must give me time to think. Let me see now, so far as I can remember, what she actually said was this . . ." And Gladys Ponsonby, sitting upright on the sofa with her feet not quite touching the floor, her eyes away from me now, looking at the wall, began cleverly to mimic the deep tone of that voice I knew so well. " 'Such a bore, my dear, because with Lionel one can *always* tell exactly what will happen *right* from beginning to end. For dinner we'll go to the Savoy Grill — it's *always* the Savoy Grill — and for two hours I'll have to listen to the pompous old fool droning away about pictures and porcelain — *always* pictures and porcelain; then, in the taxi going home he'll reach out for my hand, and he'll lean closer, and I'll get a whiff of stale cigar smoke and brandy, and he'll start burbling about how he wished, oh how he wished, he was just twenty years younger. And when we arrive at my house I'll tell him to keep the taxi, but he'll pretend he hasn't heard and pay it off quickly. And then, at the front door, while I fish for my key he'll stand beside me with a sort of silly spaniel look in his eyes, and I'll slowly put the key in the lock and slowly turn it, and then, very quickly, before he has time to move, I'll say good night and skip inside and shut the door behind me.' Why, Lionel! What's the matter, dear?"

At that point, mercifully, I must have swooned clear away. I can remember practically nothing of the rest of that terrible night. Later, I believe I walked out of the house and was driven home, but I remained more or less unconscious of everything around me until I woke up in my bed the next morning.

I awoke feeling weak and shaken. I lay still with my eyes closed trying to piece together the events of the night before. What was it Gladys Ponsonby had said? Ah, yes. About me. About Janet and me! Those outrageous, unbelievable remarks! Could Janet really have made them?

I can remember with what terrifying swiftness my hatred of Janet de Pelagia now began to grow. It all happened in a few minutes, a sudden, violent welling up of a hatred that filled me till I thought I was going to burst. I tried to dismiss it but it was on me like a fever, and in no time at all I was hunting for a method of revenge.

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I am not normally a scheming person; I consider it an odious business and have had no practice in it whatsoever. But fury and hate can concentrate a man's mind to an astonishing degree, and in no time at all a plot was forming and unfolding in my head — a plot so superior and exciting that I began to be quite carried away at the idea of it.

By the time I had filled in details and overcome one or two minor objections, my brooding, vengeful mood had changed to one of extreme elation, and I remember how I started bouncing up and down absurdly on my bed and clapping my hands. The next thing I knew I had the telephone directory on my lap and was searching eagerly for a name. I found it, picked up the telephone, and dialed the number.

"Hello," I said. "Mr. Royden? Mr. John Royden?"

"Speaking."

Well, it wasn't difficult to persuade the man to call around and see me for a moment. I'd never met him, but of course he knew my name both as an important collector of paintings and as a person of some consequence in society. I was a big fish for him to catch.

"Let me see now, Mr. Lampson," he said, "I think I ought to be free in about a couple of hours. Will that be all right?"

I told him it would be fine and gave my address.

I jumped out of bed. It was really remarkable how exhilarated I felt all of a sudden. One moment I had been in an agony of despair, contemplating murder and suicide and I don't know what; the next I was whistling an aria from Figaro in my bath. During my exercises, when I overbalanced doing a bend, I sat on the floor and giggled like a schoolboy.

At the appointed time, Mr. John Royden was shown into my library and I got up to meet him. He was a small neat man with a slightly ginger goatee. He wore a black velvet jacket, a rust-brown tie, a red pull-over, and black suède shoes. I shook his small neat hand.

"Good of you to come along so quickly, Mr. Royden," I said. After telling him again how much I admired his work, I got straight down to business. "Mr. Royden," I said. "I have a rather unusual request to make of you, something quite personal in its way."

"Yes, Mr. Lampson?" He was sitting in the chair opposite me and he cocked his head over to one side, quick and perky like a bird.

"Of course, Mr. Royden, I know I can trust you to be discreet about anything I say."

"Absolutely, Mr. Lampson."

"All right. Now my proposition is this: there is a certain lady in town here whose portrait I would like you to paint. I very much want to possess a fine painting of her. But there are certain complications. For example, I have my own reasons for not wishing her to know that it is I who am commissioning the portrait."

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Royden smiled, a crooked little smile that only just came through his beard, and he nodded his head.

"Do you think you could get to meet her," I asked, "perhaps at a cocktail party or something like that?"

"Shouldn't be too tricky, Mr. Lampson," Royden agreed.

"Good, because what I suggest is this: that you go up to her and tell her she's the sort of model you've been searching for for years — just the right face, the right figure, the right-colored eyes. You know the sort of thing. Then ask her if she'd mind sitting for you free of charge. Say you'd like to do a picture of her for the Royal Academy show. I feel sure she'd be delighted to help you, and honored too, if I may say so. Then you will paint her and exhibit the picture at the Academy and deliver it to me after the show is over. No one but you need know that I have bought it."

The small round eyes of Mr. John Royden were watching me shrewdly, I thought, and the head was cocked over to one side. He was sitting on the edge of his chair, and in this position, with his pull-over making a flash of red down his front, he reminded me of a robin on a twig listening for a suspicious noise.

"There's really nothing wrong about it at all," I said. "Just call it, if you like, a harmless little conspiracy being perpetrated by a — well — by a rather romantic old man."

"I know, Mr. Lampson, I know." He still seemed to be hesitating, so I said quickly, "I'll be glad to pay you double your usual fee."

That did it. The man actually licked his lips. "Well, Mr. Lampson, I must say this sort of thing's not really in my line, you know. But all the same, I would be a very heartless man to refuse such a, shall I say, such a romantic assignment?"

"I should like a full-length portrait, Mr. Royden, please. A large canvas about twice the size of that Manet on the wall there. And I should like her to be standing. That, to my mind, is her most graceful attitude."

"I quite understand, Mr. Lampson," Royden said. "And it will be a pleasure to paint such a lovely lady."

I expect it will, I told myself. The way you go about it, my boy, I'm quite sure it will. But I said, "All right, Mr. Royden, then I'll leave it all to you. And don't forget, please — this is a little secret between us."

When he had gone, I forced myself to sit still and take twenty-five deep breaths. It was the only way to restrain myself from jumping up and shouting for joy, like an idiot. I had never in my life felt so exhilarated. My plan was working! The most difficult part was already accomplished. There would be a wait now, a long wait. The way this man painted, it would take him several months to finish the picture. Let me see — when did the Royal Academy open again? Next July, wasn't it? In about four months' time. Well, I would just have to be patient and wait.

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I now decided, on the spur of the moment, that it would be best if I were to go abroad in the interim; and the very next morning, after sending a message to Janet telling her I had been called away, I left for Italy.

There, as always, I had a delightful time, marred only by a constant nervous excitement caused by the thought of returning to the scene of action.

Eventually I arrived back four months later, in July, on the day after the opening of the Royal Academy. I found to my relief that everything had gone according to plan during my absence. The picture of Janet de Pelagia had been painted, accepted, and hung in the exhibition, and it was already the subject of much favorable comment. I myself refrained from going to see it, but Royden told me on the telephone that there had been several inquiries by persons who wished to buy it, all of whom had been informed that it was not for sale. When the show was over, Royden delivered the picture to my house and received his money.

I immediately had the portrait carried up to my work room, and with mounting excitement I began to examine it closely. The man had painted her standing up in a black evening dress, and there was a red plush sofa in the background. Her left hand was resting on the back of a heavy chair, also of red plush, and there was a huge crystal chandelier hanging from the ceiling.

Heavens, I thought, what a hideous thing! The portrait itself wasn't so bad. He had caught the woman's expression — the forward drop of the head, the wide blue eyes, the large, ugly-beautiful mouth with the trace of a smile in one corner. He had flattered her, of course. There wasn't a wrinkle on her face or the slightest suggestion of fat under her chin. I bent forward to examine the painting of the dress. Yes, here the paint was thicker, much thicker. At this point, unable to wait another moment, I threw off my coat and prepared to go to work.

I should mention here that I am myself an expert cleaner and restorer of paintings. The cleaning, particularly, is a comparatively simple process provided one has patience and a gentle touch, and those gentlemen who make such a secret of their trade and charge such shocking prices get no business from me. Where my own pictures are concerned, I always do the job myself.

I poured out the turpentine and added a few drops of alcohol. I dipped a small wad of absorbent cotton in the mixture, squeezed it out, and then gently, very gently with a circular motion, I began to work the black paint off the dress. I could only hope that Royden had allowed each layer to dry thoroughly before applying the next; otherwise the two would merge and the process I had in mind would be impossible. Soon I would know. I was working on one square inch of black dress somewhere around the lady's waistline and I took plenty of time, cautiously testing and teasing

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the paint, adding a drop or two more of alcohol to my mixture, testing again, adding another drop until finally it was just strong enough to loosen the pigment.

For perhaps a whole hour I worked away on this little square of black, proceeding more and more gently as I came closer to the layer below. Then a tiny pink spot appeared, and gradually it spread and spread until the whole of my square inch was a clear shining patch of pink. Quickly I neutralized with pure turpentines.

So far so good. I knew now that the black paint could be removed without disturbing what was underneath. So long as I was patient and industrious I would easily be able to take it all off. Also, I had discovered the right mixture to use and just how hard I could safely rub, so things should go much more quickly now.

I must say it was rather an amusing business. I worked first from the middle of her body downward, and as the lower half of her dress came away, bit by bit, onto my little wads of absorbent cotton, a queer pink undergarment began to reveal itself. I didn't for the life of me know what the thing was called, but it was a formidable apparatus constructed of what appeared to be a strong thick elastic material, and its purpose was apparently to contain and to compress the woman's bulging figure into a neat, streamline shape, giving a quite false impression of slimness.

The whole thing seemed fantastic to me as I stepped back a pace to survey it. It gave me a strong sense of having somehow been cheated; for had I not, during all these past months, been admiring the sylphlike figure of this lady? She was a faker. No question about it. But do many other females practice this sort of deception? I wondered. I knew, of course, that in the days of stays and corsets it was usual for ladies to strap themselves up; yet for some reason I was under the impression that nowadays all they had to do was diet.

Dear me, I thought. One lives and learns.

But now, at last, the job was finished, and I stepped back again to take a final look at the picture. It was truly an astonishing sight — this woman, Janet de Pelagia, almost life-size, standing there in her pink garment in a sort of drawing room, with a great chandelier above her head and a red velvet chair by her side. She herself — and this was the most disturbing part of all — looked so completely unconcerned, with the wide, placid blue eyes, the faintly smiling ugly-beautiful mouth. Also, I noticed with something of a shock that she was exceedingly bowlegged, like a jockey. I tell you frankly, the whole thing embarrassed me.

I felt as though I had no right to be in the room, certainly no right to stare. So after a while I went out and shut the door behind me. It seemed like the only decent thing to do.

Now for the next and final step! And do not imagine, simply because

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I have not mentioned it lately, that my thirst for revenge had in any way diminished during the last few months. On the contrary it had, if anything, increased; and with the last act about to be performed, I can tell you I found it hard to contain myself. That night, for example, I didn't even go to bed.

You see, I couldn't wait to get the invitations out. I sat up all night preparing them and addressing the envelopes. There were twenty-two of them in all, and I wanted each to be a personal note. *I'm having a little dinner on Friday night, the twenty-second, at 8. I do hope you can come along. I'm so looking forward to seeing you again . . .*

The first, the most carefully phrased, was to Janet de Pelagia. In it, I regretted not having seen her for so long . . . I had been abroad . . . It was time we got together again . . . The next was to Gladys Ponsonby. Then one to Hermione, Lady Girdlestone, another to Princess Bichen, to Mrs. Cudbird, Sir Hubert Kaul, Mrs. Galbally, Peter Euan-Thomas, James Pisker, Sir Eustace Piegrome, Peter van Santen, Elizabeth Moynihan, Lord Mulherrin, Bertram Stuart, Philip Cornelius, Jack Hill, Lady Akeman, Mrs. Icely, Humphrey King-Howard, Johnny O'Coffey, Mrs. Uvary, and the Dowager Countess of Waxworth.

It was a carefully selected list, containing the most distinguished men and the most brilliant and influential women in the top layer of our society.

I was well aware that a dinner at my house was regarded as quite an occasion; everybody liked to come. And now, as I watched the point of my pen moving swiftly over the paper, I could almost see the ladies, in their pleasure, picking up their bedside telephones the morning the invitations arrived, shrill voices calling to shriller voices over the wires. "Lionel Lampson's giving a party . . . He's asked you too? Well, my dear, how nice . . . His food is always *so* good. And *such* a lovely man, isn't he though?"

Is that really what they would say? It suddenly occurred to me that it might not be like that at all. More like this perhaps: "I agree, my dear, yes, not a bad old man . . . but a bit of a bore, don't you think? What did you say? Dull? But desperately, my dear. Did Gladys Ponsonby ever tell you what Janet de Pelagia once said about him? . . . Ah, yes, I thought you'd heard that one . . . Screamingly funny, don't you think? Poor Janet, how she stood it as long as she did I don't know . . ."

Anyway, I got the invitations off, and within a couple of days everybody with the exception of Mrs. Cudbird and Sir Hubert Kaul, who were away, had accepted with pleasure. . . .

At 8:30 on the evening of the twenty-second, my large drawing room was filled with people. They stood about the room admiring the pictures, drinking their Martinis, talking with loud voices. The women

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smelled strongly of scent, the men were pink-faced and carefully buttoned up in their dinner jackets. Janet de Pelagia was wearing the same black dress she had worn for the portrait, and every time I caught sight of her a kind of huge bubble-vision — as in those absurd cartoons — would float up above my head, and in it I would see Janet as she was now in the portrait.

I moved from group to group, chatting amiably with them all, listening to their talk. Behind me, I could hear Mrs. Galbally telling Sir Eustace Piegrome and James Pisker how the man at the next table to hers at Claridge's the night before had had red lipstick on his white mustache. On the other side, Lady Girdlestone was telling somebody where one could get truffles cooked in brandy, and I could see Mrs. Icely whispering something to Lord Mulherrin while his lordship kept shaking his head slowly from side to side like an old dispirited metronome.

Dinner was announced, and we all moved out.

"My goodness!" they cried as they entered the dining room. "How dark and sinister!"

"I can hardly see a thing!"

"What divine little candles!"

"But Lionel, how romantic!"

There were six very thin candles set about two feet apart from one another about the center of the long table. Their small flames made a little glow of light around the table itself, but left the rest of the room in darkness. It was an amusing arrangement, and it suited my purpose well. The guests soon settled themselves in their right places and the meal began.

They all seemed to enjoy the candlelight, and things went famously, though for some reason the darkness caused them to speak much louder than usual. Janet de Pelagia's voice struck me as being particularly strident.

For my part, I was watching the candles. They were so thin I knew it would not be long before they burned down to their bases. Also, I was highly nervous — but at the same time intensely exhilarated. Every time I heard Janet's voice or caught sight of her face, a little bubble of excitement exploded inside me.

They were eating their strawberries when at last I decided the time had come. I took a deep breath, and in a loud voice I said, "I'm afraid we'll have to have the lights on now. The candles are nearly finished. Mary, oh, Mary, switch on the lights, will you please."

There was a moment of silence after my announcement. I heard the maid walking over to the door, then the gentle click of the switch, and the room was flooded with a blaze of light.

At that point, I got up from my chair and walked gently from the room, but as I went I saw a sight that I shall never forget as long as I live. It was Janet, with both hands in mid-air, stopped, frozen rigid, caught in the act of gesticulating toward some-

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one across the table. Her mouth had dropped open two inches, and she wore the surprised, not-quite-understanding look of a person who, precisely one second before, has been shot right through the heart.

In the hall outside, I paused and listened to the uproar. Then — and this was the sweetest moment of all — I heard Lord Mulherrin's voice, roaring above the rest, "Here! Someone! Hurry! Give her some water quick!"

Out in the street, the chauffeur helped me into my car, and soon we were away from London and bowling merrily along the Great North Road toward this, my other house, which is only ninety-five miles from town.

The next two days I spent in gloating. I mooned around, half drowned in my own complacency and filled with a sense of pleasure.

It wasn't until this morning, when Gladys Ponsonby called me on the telephone, that I suddenly came to my senses and realized I was not a hero at all, but an outcast. She informed me — with what I thought was just a trace of relish — that everybody was up in arms against me, that all my old and loving friends were saying the most terrible things about me and had sworn never, never to speak to me again. Except her, she kept saying, everybody except her. And didn't I think it would be rather cozy, she asked, if she were to come down and stay with me a few days?

I'm afraid I was too upset, by that time, even to answer her politely. I put the telephone down and went away to weep.

Then, at noon today, came the final crushing blow. The post arrived, and with it — I can hardly bring myself to write about it, I am so ashamed — came a letter, the sweetest, most tender little note imaginable, from none other than Janet de Pelagia. She forgave me completely, she wrote, for everything I had done. She knew it was only a joke, and I must not listen to the horrid things other people were saying about me. She loved me, as she always would, to her dying day.

Oh, what a cad, what a brute I felt when I read this! And I felt even more so when I found that she had actually sent me, by the same post, a small present as an added sign of her affection — a half-pound jar of my favorite food, fresh caviar.

I can never resist good caviar. It is perhaps my greatest weakness. So although I naturally had no appetite for dinner this evening, I must confess I took a few spoonfuls of the stuff to console myself in my misery. It is even possible that I took a shade too much, because I haven't been feeling any too chipper this last hour or so. There's a queer burning sensation in my stomach, and my head is awfully hot. I think what I'll do is go up now and take some bicarbonate of soda, then I might lie down for a bit to rest my nerves. I can come back and finish this later.

You know, now that I come to think about it, I really do feel rather ill all of a sudden.

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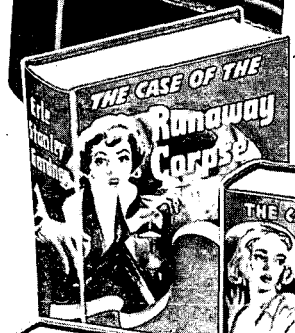


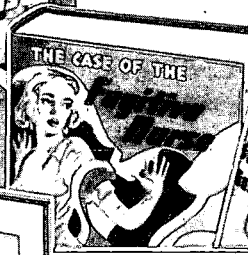


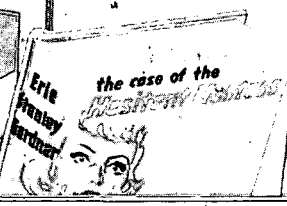

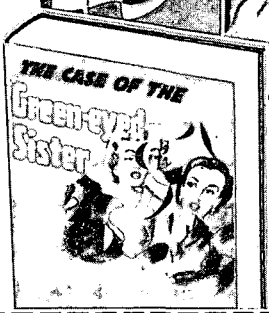


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